WILL THE UK SPLIT? A HISTORIAN'S VIEW

MARY BEARD ON THE SHOCK OF **THE NUDE**

World Histories

AZTECS in their own words

Discover the human stories behind the bloody myths

Nareshbaiwala

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MENOPAUSE

How science explored the evil of the Holocaust

Secret lives of the 18th-century **transgender pioneers**

Nansen's daring mission to cross Greenland

The nine books you need to read this spring

ISSUE 21
MARCH/APRIL 2020

Find out more at
historyextra.com

VISIT…

LANZAROTE
Caliente.com

Pearson

Get closer to the subject you love!

Pearson are currently recruiting teachers to become Examiners for our GCSE & GCE qualifications.

This is an excellent opportunity to:

- Develop your career in education
- Gain invaluable insight into assessment
- Earn some extra money in a part-time role, alongside any full time commitments you may have.

To find out further information, please visit
associate.pearson.com

Illustration by Lauren Rolwing

Sylvia strikes back

Medical Secretary gives something back to research and treatment

Sylvia's friends remembered her for her kind heart, and her strong desire to help others. Even though she suffered lifelong poor health, while also caring for her critically ill mother.

But Sylvia did more than put on a brave face: she struck back against illness by working as a medical secretary, and following medical advances keenly. That's how she found out that with conditions such as stroke, the right treatment and back-up can make all the difference when given promptly.

So it's not surprising Sylvia decided that **one of the best things she could do would be to strike back again, by supporting the work of the Stroke Association – and leave us a generous gift in her Will.**

Today, we take time to remember her. Because Sylvia is still playing an important part in helping us create a future free of stroke, and turn around the lives of thousands of stroke survivors each year.

Stroke association

Together we can conquer stroke.

Call 020 7566 1505 email legacy@stroke.org.uk or visit stroke.org.uk/legacy

Registered office: Stroke Association House, 240 City Road, London EC1V 2PR. Registered as a Charity in England and Wales (No 211015) and in Scotland (SC037789). Also registered in Northern Ireland (XT33805), Isle of Man (No 945) and Jersey (NPO 369). Stroke Association is a Company Limited by Guarantee in England and Wales (No 61274)

Will Brexit mark a new dawn for the UK? Or will it fuel the kind of rift that has torn other states apart?

As the United Kingdom sets out into its brave new post-EU world, questions persist about the form it will take in the years and decades to come. In January, prime minister Boris Johnson rejected calls for a second Scottish independence referendum, but there are those who argue that Brexit marks a major shift in circumstances for Scotland since it last voted on its future in 2014.

This issue, we explore **the history of the 'nation state'**, and examine the forces that have threatened the survival of such states around the world, from eastern Europe to the Middle East. **What are the roots of these crises?** And why are such tensions building now? Read our experts' insights from page 28.

Through the ages, identity has been based on various factors. A sense of 'nationality' is one; others include reproductive roles and gender. Yet, as two of this issue's features explore, these are also open to renegotiation. On page 20, Susan Mattern charts the changing ways in which **the menopause** has been viewed around the globe, and how those views shape how women experience that life stage. And, on page 48, Jen Manion introduces **pioneering transgender individuals** who challenged societal norms.

From the **real lives of the Aztecs** (page 12) to the **psychologists who explored the behaviour that enabled the Holocaust** (page 64), there's plenty more besides. And thanks to everyone who voted in our poll to choose history's greatest leader – the response was fantastic. You can discover the winner at *historyextra.com/greatleaders.*

Matt Elton
Editor
matt.elton@immediate.co.uk
+44 (0)117 300 8645

BBC World Histories

BBC World Histories explores the history behind the headlines, and offers fresh perspectives on our global past

MORE FROM US

historyextra.com

The website of *BBC World Histories* and our sister magazines, *BBC History Magazine* and *BBC History Revealed*, is packed with thought-provoking world history content.

The History Extra podcast

You can now listen to three new episodes of our podcast, which feature historians including Mary Beard and David Reynolds, each week. All are available free via iTunes and other providers, or at historyextra.com/podcasts.

Digital editions

BBC World Histories is available for the Kindle, Kindle Fire, iPad/iPhone, Google Play and Zinio. You can find us in your app store.

BBC History Magazine

Britain's bestselling history magazine is available around the world, and is published 13 times a year in print and a wide range of digital editions. Turn to page 27 for our latest subscription offer.

HISTORY
HENRY V'S GREATEST VICTORY (AND IT WASN'T AGINCOURT)

Social media

twitter.com/historyextra
facebook.com/historyextra

This issue on sale: 27 February
Next issue on sale: 23 April

CONTACT US *(Full details on page 85)*

EDITORIAL
Email worldhistories@historyextra.com
Phone +44 (0)117 314 7377
Website historyextra.com/worldhistories
Twitter twitter.com/historyextra

SUBSCRIPTIONS
Email bbcworldhistories@buysubscriptions.com
Phone UK: 03330 160 708
Overseas: +44 1604 212832

COVER ILLUSTRATION: DAVIDE BONAZZI–SALZMANART. THIS PAGE: STEVE SAYERS–THE SECRET STUDIO/DREAMSTIME

CONTENTS *Features*

Sea ice in a fjord in Greenland. In this issue's Footsteps feature on page 90, we follow the journey of Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen, who crossed the island's vast ice sheet in the late 19th century

ALAMY

12
Aztecs in their own words ✪
BY CAMILLA TOWNSEND

How historians are using pictorial sources and indigenous journals to revise European narratives of Aztec history

20
A time of change ✪
BY SUSAN MATTERN

The evolution of our understanding of the menopause, and its influence on women's roles in societies around the world

28
The history of the nation state
BY JERRY BROTTON

The idea of national communities forged by geography and culture may seem self-evident. Yet nation states have a relatively short past – and may not have a long future

34
Ideas of nationhood ✪
BY ANGEL SMITH, JOHN CONNELLY, JOHAN FRANZÉN & DAVID REYNOLDS

What happens when regions want to break away from larger states? Experts review independence movements in Scotland, Catalonia, Iraqi Kurdistan and Yugoslavia

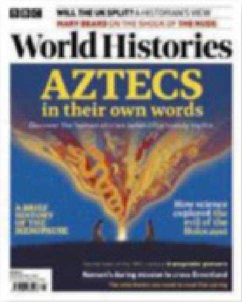
48
Transgender history ✪
BY JEN MANION

Meet the 'female husbands' – individuals assigned as female at birth but living as men – who challenged societal views of sex, relationships, law and work in past centuries

64
Experiments in evil ✪
BY DAVID EDMONDS

How psychologists devised groundbreaking studies in attempts to understand the behaviours that enabled the Holocaust

✪ On the cover



COVER ILLUSTRATION BY **DAVIDE BONAZZI**

Naresh Jaiswal

CONTRIBUTORS

THE BRIEFING

6 **Viewpoint:** *Michael Booth* explores the long roots of tensions in east Asia

10 **History Headlines:** Discoveries and developments in the world of history

REGULARS

9 **Feedback:** Responses to our experts' nominations for the greatest leader in global history

54 **A Year in Pictures:** 1982 *by Richard Overy*

62 **Extraordinary People:** Sanmao – globe-trotting icon of Chinese youth *by Mike Fu*

98 **Parting Shot:** Join a mass pilgrimage honouring a sea goddess in Taiwan

CULTURE

72 **Interview:** *Mary Beard* discusses the role of the nude in western art with Matt Elton and Janina Ramirez ✪

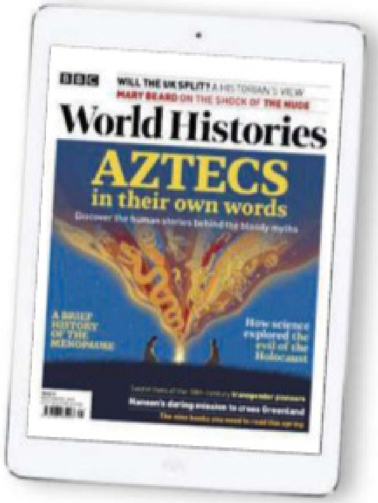
80 **Agenda:** The latest exhibitions, films, books, events, radio and television

JOURNEYS

86 **Wonders of the World:** Bhaktapur, Nepal *by Paul Bloomfield*

90 **Footsteps:** Nansen's traverse of the Greenland Ice Sheet *by Jon Gertner* ✪

46 **Subscribe** to *BBC World Histories* and enjoy a **free issue** when you start a 14-day trial



Expert voices from the world of history

Mary Beard

What makes nude art different from porn? That's one of the questions discussed on **page 72** by the professor of classics and presenter of recent BBC TV series *Mary Beard's Shock of the Nude*. "How do we explain why one painting of female genitalia is in a gallery, whereas we'd likely find similar photos in a not-wholly-salubrious shop?"

David Edmonds

"Is it possible that people do bad things just because they're told to?" asks BBC journalist Edmonds, who from **page 64** explores social psychology studies trying to make sense of the Holocaust. "One experiment revealed how easily humans divide into groups and then discriminate against other groups," he explains.

Mike Fu

In writing about travels in Africa and beyond, one young Chinese-born woman revealed new horizons for her compatriots. "Sanmao's earnest, egalitarian sensibilities and casual worldliness cast her as a figure of devotion for millions of youth, especially young women," explains writer and translator Fu from **page 62**.

Jen Manion

"Female husbands usually became known to local media in times of crisis, often arrest or death," says the associate professor of history at Amherst College. From **page 48**, Manion explores the stories of individuals assigned as female at birth, but who lived with male identities and with female partners in past centuries.

Susan Mattern

Menopause affects half of the population – yet, as the distinguished research professor at the University of Georgia reveals on **page 20**, our understanding of its causes, symptoms and wider impacts is still nascent. "The word 'menopause' was invented as recently as 1821, by a French doctor," she points out.

Camilla Townsend

By revisiting painted histories and post-conquest journals, the story of the Aztecs is today being rewritten. "The Aztecs who emerge from these documents bear little resemblance to the people described in Spanish texts of the colonial era," explains the distinguished professor of history at Rutgers University from **page 12**.

The Briefing

The history behind today's news

View-point

Expert opinions on historical issues that touch today's world

EAST ASIAN RELATIONS

Eastern enmities

China claims Taiwan; Koreans resent the Japanese, and that feeling is reciprocated. East Asia is a tinderbox of tensions with long historical roots

BY MICHAEL BOOTH

We are told that this will be the Asian century, during which China in particular will attain global economic and political supremacy – and perhaps cultural dominance, too.

But many also believe that if there is to be a Third World War, it could begin in east Asia. Perhaps it might be sparked by some convulsion within North Korea, or a confrontation in the Taiwan Strait – which has long held the unenviable title of the world's number-one military flashpoint. Or it might erupt on Dokdo (Takeshima in Japanese), islets off the east coast of South Korea claimed by Japan as well as both Koreas.

Though Japan and South Korea would appear to have many mutual economic, military, diplomatic and cultural interests, and though Japan and China are among each other's greatest trading partners, barely a season passes without a diplomatic spat, the imposition of trade sanctions or military jostling between them. The tension is multidirectional: China imposes sanctions on South Korea for hosting a US missile system one day, Japan changes South Korea's status on its most-trusted trading nations list another, South Korean courts find Japanese firms guilty of war crimes the next. All while China is amassing the world's largest military, Japan's rulers attempt to overturn its pacifist constitution, and a unilateral declaration of independence from Taiwan, threatened for years (albeit still pretty unlikely), would almost certainly prompt China to invade. Then, of course, there is Kim Jong-un, his finger poised over a nuclear button in Pyongyang.

Open aggression

Animosity occasionally spills out onto the streets. In 2012, after the Japanese government nationalised the Senkaku Islands (more disputed outcrops lying between Taiwan and Okinawa), 51-year-old Li Jianli was beaten almost

Michael Booth is a journalist and author. His latest book is *Three Tigers, One Mountain: A Journey through the Bitter History and Current Conflicts of China, Korea and Japan* (Jonathan Cape, 2020)

東條英機
甲級戰犯
安倍晉三
打倒日
討日
倒
責任
主義
行動委

Protesters in Hong Kong burn banners in 2012 after Japan nationalised the Senkaku Islands, which are also claimed by China

to death in the Chinese city of Xi'an. Li wasn't even Japanese – he just happened to be driving a Japanese car.

While researching my new book, I spent time at a demonstration outside the Japanese embassy in Seoul. This protest, which has taken place every Wednesday since 1992, calls for a sincere official apology and reparations for the sexual enslavement of women by the Japanese military during the Second World War.

The resentment is reciprocated, at least by a minority in Japan. In Yokohama, I encountered a convoy of black minivans carrying loudspeakers that spewed a tirade of anti-Korean invective. For many years, various right-wing factions have taken to the streets to threaten and insult ethnic communities in Japan's cities, particularly Osaka, home to the country's largest Korean population.

Most see the animosity of the Chinese and the Koreans towards Japan as rooted in the latter's colonial expansionism, which began in 1876 with the imposition of an unequal trade treaty on Korea. The Chinese got involved but were defeated in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895. Japan then annexed Korea entirely in 1910, edged its way into north-east China in 1931, and expanded south through Manchuria and along the eastern coast to Hong Kong and beyond. Shortly before attacking Hong Kong in 1941, Japan raided Pearl Harbor, bringing the United States into the conflict – ironic, since Japan's imperial ambitions had been inspired by American gunboat diplomacy.

In July 1853, US Commodore Matthew Perry arrived at Kurihama, near the entrance to Tokyo Bay, with four heavily armed 'black ships' to demand that Japan allow American vessels access to its ports. This ignited already simmering unrest in Japan, leading to a small scale revolution – the so-called Meiji Restoration – and the country's subsequent militarisation.

We are told that this will be the Asian century... But many also believe a Third World War could begin in east Asia

Indeed, at the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal in 1946, General Kanji Ishiwara, who had been in charge of the 1931 invasion of China, referred to that incident. "Haven't you heard of Perry?" he asked an American prosecutor. "[Japan] took your country as its teacher, and set about learning how to be aggressive."

So, if playing the historical blame game, America would appear to be a prime culprit for the current situation, particularly if we consider its often controversial post-Second World War involvement in Japan, Korea and Taiwan. At least, that's what I thought at the start of my research, as I stood beside the memorial to Perry at Kurihama. Later, in China, I discovered that a different western imperial power is blamed for that country's 20th 'century of shame': Britain. Which set me thinking that if the British had not destabilised the Qing dynasty with an illegal opium trade in

→

GETTY IMAGES

A relief depicting Japanese soldiers on the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo. Chinese and Korean people criticise senior Japanese politicians who worship at the shrine commemorating war fallen, including more than 1,000 war criminals

ALAMY

the mid-19th century, perhaps the Japanese would not have had such an easy ride through the region later on.

Western perspective

Of course, in all of this I was guilty of a dreadful western-centric solipsism. China, Korea and Japan didn't need us to stoke their mutual hatreds. They've mistrusted, resented, detested and fought each other for centuries. Some historians argue that the roots of this lie in the ancient Confucian hierarchy, with China as the 'Middle Kingdom' called on to civilise the world, Korea as the lesser sibling and Japan as the lowest in the hierarchy. In military terms, though, the conflicts date back at least to the 13th century, when Mongol fleets carrying Chinese and Korean troops were twice repelled by the original kamikaze – literally 'divine wind' – while attempting to invade Japan's Kyushu island.

Hostilities between Japan and Korea were reignited during the Imjin Wars of the late 16th century, when Japan's unifying *daimyō* (feudal lord) Toyotomi Hideyoshi invaded the peninsula and inflicted atrocities upon the Koreans. These included the killing of tens of thousands of Koreans and removal of their noses as trophies, which were interred in *hanazuka* ('nose mounds') in Kyoto and Bizen.

The Imjin Wars are still keenly remembered in Korea, yet largely unknown outside the region. More than a million Koreans – almost one-third of the population – are believed to have died. "Hell cannot be in some other place apart from this," wrote a Japanese Buddhist monk who witnessed one massacre.

Japan visited a great deal more hellishness upon its neighbours during the first half of the 20th century, before itself suffering the wrath of the US in 1945. Further suffering was subsequently inflicted by the dictatorial rulers of China, Korea and Taiwan upon their own people, yet it is the Japanese who remain the primary focus of resentment in the region. Before I started my journey, I believed that I had a reasonable grasp of the charge sheet against Japan. I didn't: it was worse than I thought. But if Europe and Israel could come to terms with Germany's war crimes, and the Philippines, Indonesia and other countries also occupied by Japan (including, of course, Taiwan) no longer seem to harbour much animosity towards the Japanese, why do the Koreas and China persist with their ill-feeling?

Is there a note of insincerity, audible only to Koreans and Chinese, that renders Japanese contrition void?

As well as the various disputed islands, the Chinese and Korean people I spoke to most often cited as a factor the lack of apology on the part of the Japanese. Many mentioned Tokyo's Yasukuni Shrine, where war fallen – including more than 1,000 convicted of war crimes – are commemorated, and where senior Japanese politicians still worship.

Again, some blame here can be apportioned to the US. With the Treaty of Versailles and its harsh consequences on post-First World War Germany still fresh in its memory, not to mention anxiety about Communist China, the US was notably lenient on Japan's leaders post-1945. But numerous Japanese prime ministers and emperors have since offered apologies to their former enemies, expressing 'remorse' or 'deep regret' almost on an annual basis. Is there a bat squeak of insincerity, audible only to Koreans and Chinese, that renders Japanese contrition void?

Actually, there does seem to be. But part of the problem might also be that, compared with the Chinese and even in some ways the South Koreans, the Japanese enjoy a high level of freedom of expression. For a variety of murky reasons, a minority continues to exploit that freedom to provoke its neighbours.

Yet there is hope. It lies, I think, in continuing cultural and economic exchange: it lies with smartphones and K-Pop, kimchi, anime and manga, tourism and technology, with Pokémon and computer chips. Here's hoping. 🌐

Feed-back

WHO IS THE GREATEST LEADER IN WORLD HISTORY?

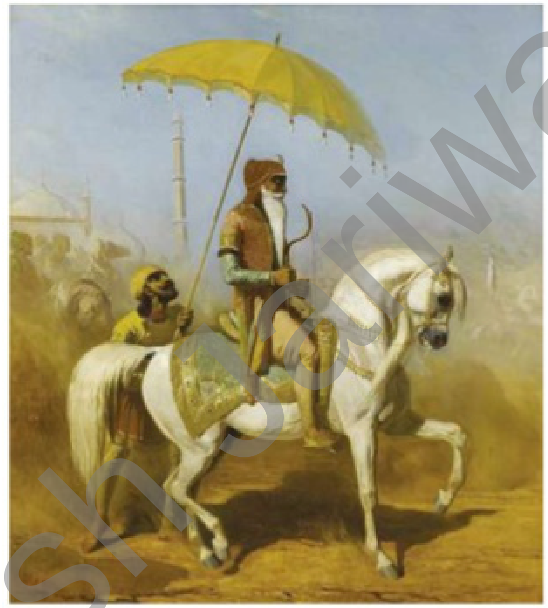
Last issue, we asked a panel of experts to nominate the leaders they considered to have been the greatest in history. Many readers responded with their own views; you can read the full list at *historyextra.com/greatleaders*

“Really? No Alexander, Scipio Africanus, Hannibal or Caesar? Not even Augustus? Justinian?
Sid Ghosh, via Facebook

“On the list I see Amilcar Cabral, who liberated African lands from Portuguese colonial rule, but not Gandhi, who liberated India from British colonial rule, nor Martin Luther King Jr, who led the civil rights movement in the US.
Ritish Patel, by email

“Abraham Lincoln’s reputation as the ‘Great Emancipator’ rests not only on the Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment, with its unprecedented enforcement clause and unneeded presidential signature, but also on his request of Frederick Douglass to devise a plan to get as many slaves as possible out of the South while his re-election, the issue of the Proclamation’s constitutionality and the outcome of the war seemed in doubt.

Lincoln also approved of bills abolishing segregation on omnibuses in Washington DC; allowing black witnesses in federal courts; equalising penalties for the same crime; for equal pay for black soldiers; and ending discrimination on the basis of colour in hiring US Mail carriers. African-Americans picnicked on the White House grounds. He supported the activities of the Freedmen’s Bureau. He approved the transfer of hundreds of thousands of acres of abandoned plantation lands to freedmen and their families.


Ranjit Singh, ruler of the Sikh empire from 1801 to 1839, was among the leaders that experts nominated as the greatest in history

After meeting with Lincoln three times in the White House, Frederick Douglass was “impressed with his entire freedom from popular prejudice against the colored race”. As the historian Eric Foner said, by the latter stages of his presidency Lincoln had envisioned the beginnings of a biracial democracy. He fully deserves his historical reputation in the struggle for freedom and, indeed, towards creating a biracial republic.
Jeffrey Javid, Madison, Wisconsin

“You should include two more names. First, Emperor Ashoka, who spread peace and Buddhism across India. Second, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj [c1627/30–80, founder of the Maratha kingdom of India], who in the 16th century had an understanding of the importance of economy, trade and inclusion of religions, and played a huge role in creating awareness of Swaraj (independence) which became important in our struggle for freedom from British rule. These leaders were significant in shaping the Indian way of life.
Nilesh Limaye, by email

“Cyrus II [of Persia] should be there – the first ruler ever to be titled ‘the Great’. He was the founder of the very first multinational empire, and of human rights. He was the first ruler to ban slavery. Alexander the Great believed himself to be the only true successor of Cyrus. He was mentioned in the Torah and the Bible for freeing Jewish slaves from Babylon, sending them back to Jerusalem and building them new temples to replace those destroyed by the Babylonians.
Okhan Roudbaraki, via Facebook

“Boudica and Joan of Arc – but not Napoleon? I suspect they are on the list solely because they are women, which doesn’t help gender equality at all. They were great leaders, but come on – they don’t even come close to Napoleon.
Nóra Fenyőházi, via Facebook

Join the conversation

Email worldhistories@historyextra.com
Twitter twitter.com/historyextra
Facebook facebook.com/historyextra
Post *BBC World Histories*, Immediate Media Company Bristol Limited, Eagle House, Colston Avenue, Bristol BS1 4ST, UK

GETTY IMAGES

Nareshkariwala

History Headlines

❶ **LAKE VÄTTERN** SWEDEN

Norse code

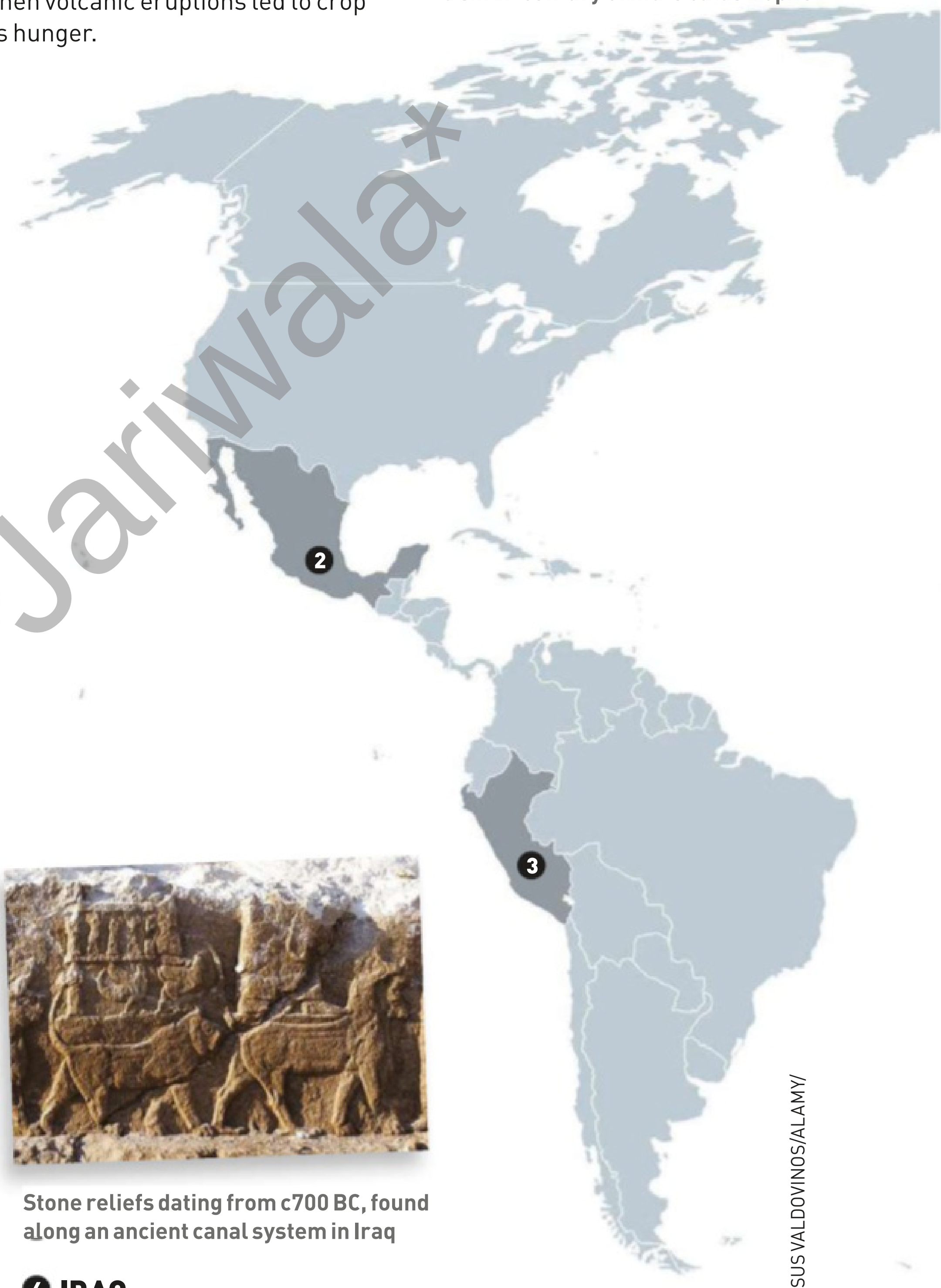
The inscription on a ninth-century runestone may reveal Viking fears of climate catastrophe. Raised near Lake Vättern in Sweden, the Rök stone, which bears the world's longest runic inscription, is thought to be a memorial to a slain son. Experts from three Swedish universities collaborating on a new study suggest that "the inscription deals with an anxiety triggered by a son's death and the fear of a new climate crisis similar to the catastrophic one after [AD]536", when volcanic eruptions led to crop devastation and mass hunger.

Runes on the Rök stone may provide evidence of Viking fears of a repeat of a sixth-century climate catastrophe

❷ **MEXICO CITY** MEXICO

Plunder proven

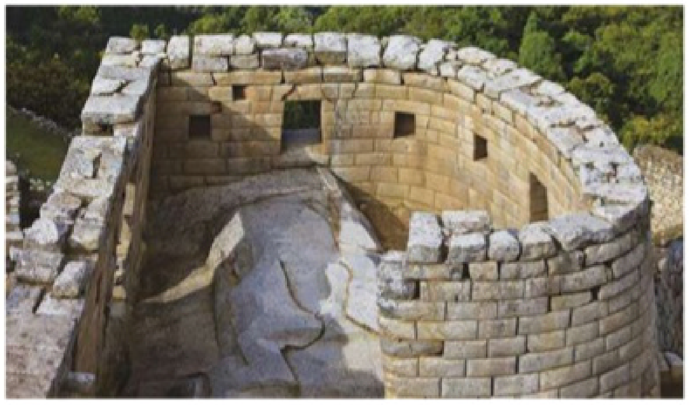
A 2kg gold bar (below) unearthed in Mexico City four decades ago has been confirmed as being composed of Aztec gold plundered by Cortés' Conquistadors. New fluorescent X-ray chemical analysis of the ingot, discovered during construction work in downtown Mexico City in 1981, revealed that it was cast in 1519–20 as Spanish troops retreated after a battle for the Aztec city of Tenochtitlán, the ruins of which lie under Mexico City. The Conquistadors are known to have made bars with gold objects from the Aztec treasury, to make them easier to ship back to Europe.



❸ **MACHU PICCHU** PERU

Cultural vandalism

A group of tourists damaged the 15th-century Incan citadel of Machu Picchu in January. Authorities asserted that six individuals – from Argentina, Chile, Brazil and France – entered a restricted section of the Temple of the Sun at the Unesco World Heritage site, where a wall was damaged; faeces were also subsequently detected there. Five of the tourists were deported, while the sixth was prosecuted and found guilty of damaging Peru's cultural heritage, receiving a fine and a suspended prison sentence.



The Temple of the Sun at the Incan citadel of Machu Picchu, Peru, damaged by tourists in January

Stone reliefs dating from c700 BC, found along an ancient canal system in Iraq

❹ **IRAQ**

Of gods and kings

Ten extremely rare Assyrian carvings have been found by Kurdish Iraqi and Italian archaeologists along the banks of an ancient canal system in northern Iraq. The 2,700-year-old stone reliefs are believed to have been created during the reign of King Sargon II. The intricate decoration – rarely found outside Assyrian royal residences – is thought to depict the monarch watching a procession of Assyrian gods.

GETTY IMAGES/AFP PHOTO-INAH-JESUS VALDOVINOS/ALAMY/
ISABELLA FINCHI CONTINI

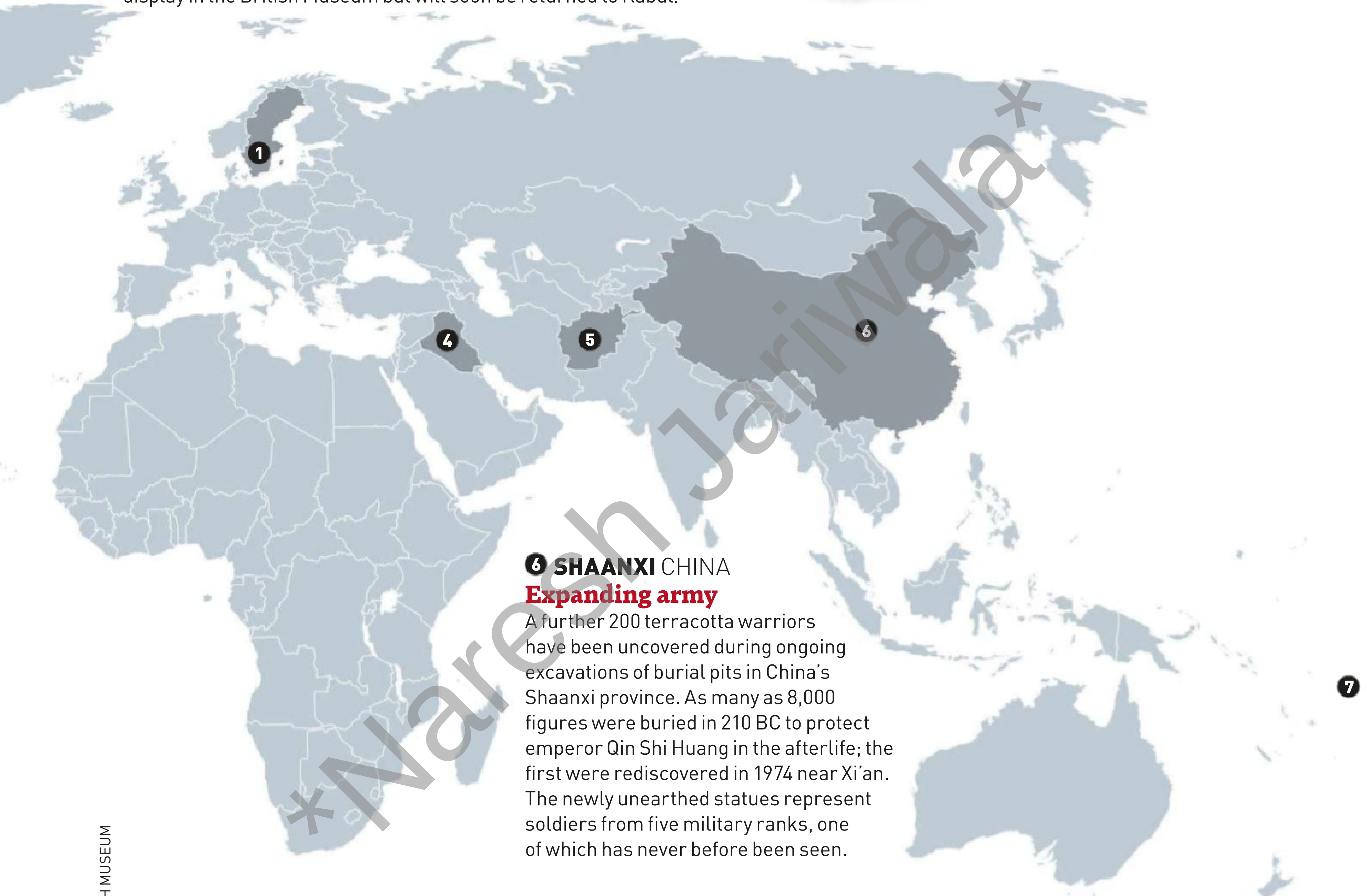
WORDS **ELLIE CAWTHORNE**

❺ **BAGHLAN PROVINCE** AFGHANISTAN

Ancient art recovered

An ancient sculpture has been recovered, three decades after it was stolen from a Kabul museum. The limestone sculpture of two bulls, carved in the second century AD when Afghanistan was part of the Kushan empire, was discovered during excavations in the 1950s at the archaeological site of Surkh Kotal. It was then looted from the National Museum of Afghanistan during the 1990s civil war. A British auction house recognised the item after the Art Loss Register reported it to the Metropolitan Police in 2019. The sculpture is on temporary display in the British Museum but will soon be returned to Kabul.

An 1,800-year-old limestone sculpture of two bulls, looted from Kabul in the 1990s and recently recovered by London police



❻ **SHAANXI** CHINA

Expanding army

A further 200 terracotta warriors have been uncovered during ongoing excavations of burial pits in China's Shaanxi province. As many as 8,000 figures were buried in 210 BC to protect emperor Qin Shi Huang in the afterlife; the first were rediscovered in 1974 near Xi'an. The newly unearthed statues represent soldiers from five military ranks, one of which has never before been seen.

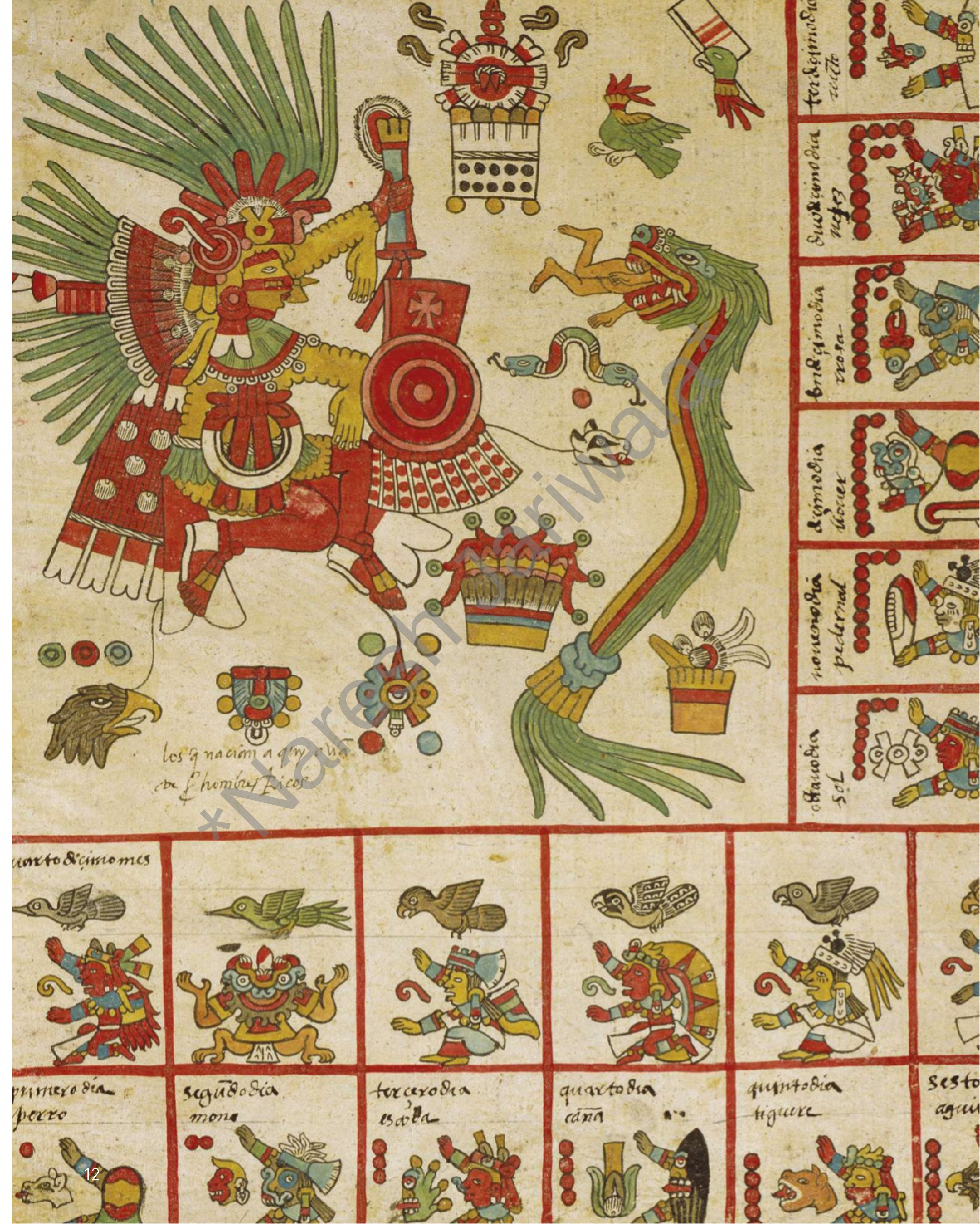
BILL CODE/TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

An aerial view of the Pulemelei Mound in the Samoan jungle, one of a number of star-shaped platforms in the area

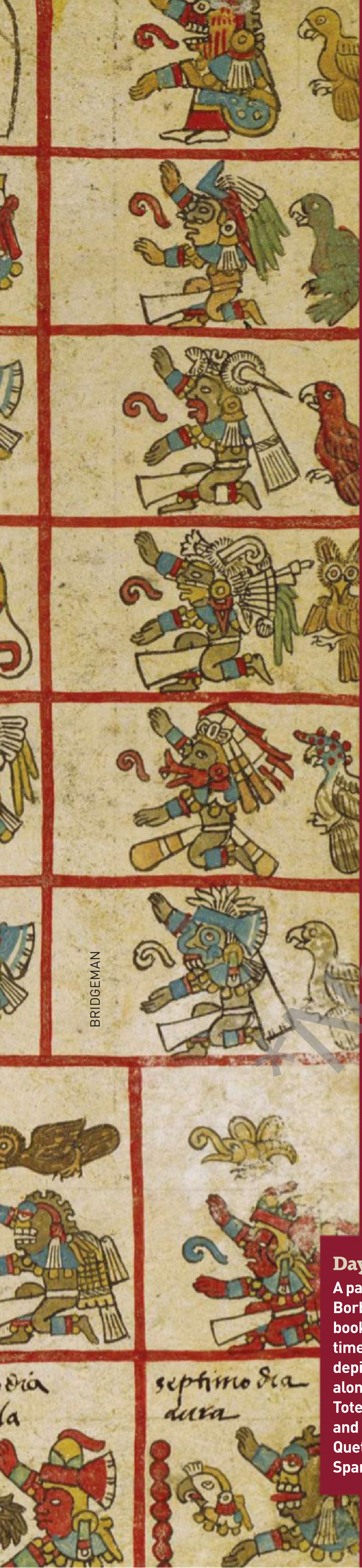
❼ **SAVAI'I** SAMOA

Population plus

Laser-mapping studies of a Samoan jungle suggest the area's population may have been bigger than previously thought. Experts surveyed the land around the Pulemelei Mound, dating from 1100–1400 and largest of around 80 star-shaped platforms in the area. The study revealed that the eight-pointed mound was part of a much bigger network of settlements and other star mounds now covered by dense jungle. 🌐


terzedezimodia
viento
duodezimodia
...
onzezimodia
rrosa
dezimodia
llouer
nouenodia
pedernal
otauodia
sol
los q nacian a qui eran
de ser hombres ricos
uarto dezimo mes
primero dia
perro
segudodia
mona
tercerodia
escoba
quartodia
caña
quintodia
tiguere
sesto
agui

Naresh Sriwala



BRIDGEMAN

Aztecs in their own words

Views of the indigenous people of central Mexico have long been shaped by accounts written by Spanish invaders and colonial settlers – but, as **Camilla Townsend** explains, if we focus instead on the Aztecs' own records, a very different picture emerges

Days of wonder
A page of the so-called Codex Borbonicus, an Aztec folding book painted around the time of the Spanish invasion, depicts days of the calendar alongside the deities Xipe Totec (in a flayed human skin) and the feathered serpent Quetzalcóatl. Notes in Spanish have been added

→

In 1579, a son was born to a well-to-do indigenous family living in the town of Amaquemecan, New Spain (encompassing today's Mexico). His parents gave him the Christian name Domingo, but he was also sometimes called Chimalpahin, meaning 'He Ran with a Shield' in their language, Nahuatl. It had been his great-great-grandfather's name.

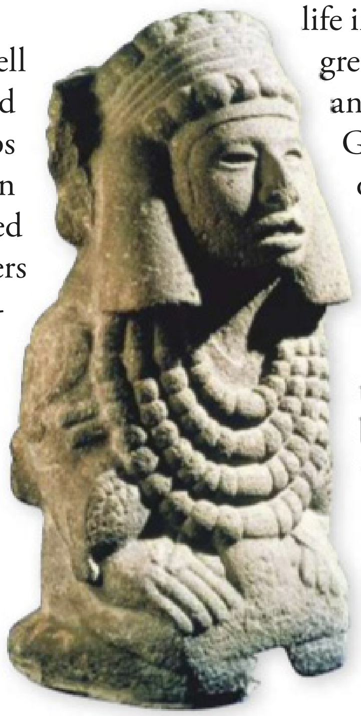
The boy had a happy childhood, growing up in a four-sided complex of adobe rooms surrounding a bright, flower-filled patio where much of the women's daily work of spinning, weaving and tortilla-making was done. Outside the home lay fields of corn and beans in which the men laboured. Chimalpahin's family was a proud one: they were related to the nobility of the kingdom of Chalco, of which Amaquemecan had been a part. Chalco, though at one time conquered by the Aztecs of nearby Tenochtitlán (now Mexico City), had grown to be that people's close ally. Together they dominated the central valley of Mexico, and the Aztecs governed much of the surrounding land as well. In the 1580s, Amaquemecan might have seemed like a backwater, but Chimalpahin was well aware that it had been a player in the days of the Aztec empire.

Chimalpahin loved his grandmother, who had been a child in the 1530s, the period right after the Spaniards first came. She had stories to tell, and she found a listener in her grandson. She described the old days: the feasts of trussed wild birds and honeyed hot chocolate, the evening concerts with drums and the haunting music of conch shells. But she also recalled the frightening periods of deadly drought, and the wars in her parents' time when the Aztecs expanded their power and resource base so that the people of their valley need never know hunger again.

There were other subjects that she did not dwell on, because the boy was a devout Christian and loved his friar-teachers. She knew, and perhaps whispered to him, that the town church had been built on the site where the old temple pyramid used to stand. There, on important holy days, prisoners of war had occasionally been sacrificed in a desperate effort to gain the favour of the old gods. It hadn't worked, she said; the priests had been mistaken in their teachings, and she was still bitter about that.

The boy's grandmother described feasts of trussed wild birds and honeyed hot chocolate, concerts with drums and the haunting music of conch shells

The grandmother showed the boy the old painted histories used by talented speakers and singers as mnemonic devices helping them recount and dramatise the people's story during firelit evenings. Another relative showed him some old parchments written in Nahuatl, the words spelled out using the Roman alphabet. The friars' earliest students, those of Chimalpahin's grandmother's generation, had enjoyed taking their new knowledge of phonetic writing and using it to transcribe the old oral history performances. The boy was fascinated by these ageing papers, and never forgot them – nor the attics in which he had seen them.



Idol speculation

A pre-Columbian statue representing Chalchiuhtlicue, a female Aztec deity associated with water and fertility – an important god in a land prone to drought

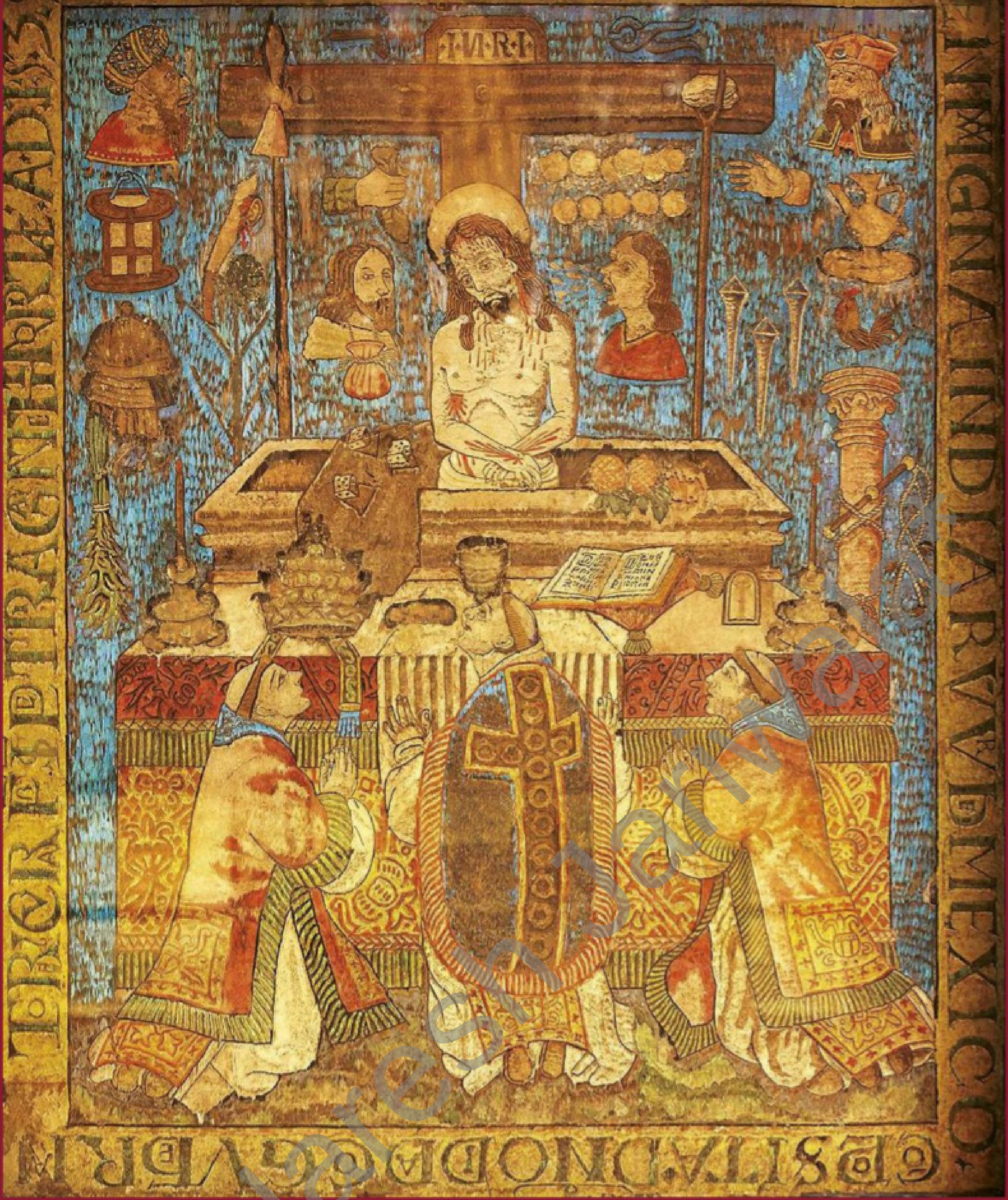
BRIDGEMAN

Church and city

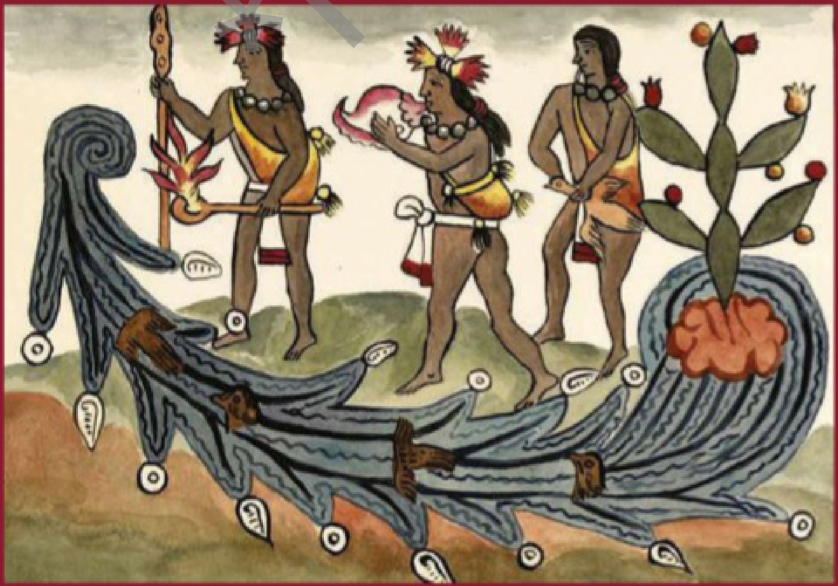
When Chimalpahin, now more and more often called Domingo, was around 11 years old, he went to Mexico City to be educated and to work for the church. He loved to visit the pair of captive jaguars kept in a pretty cage outside a government building not far from where the Aztec emperor Moctezuma had once had a zoo. In his journal, he recorded his sadness when the jaguars were shipped off to Spain as a present for the king.

That event notwithstanding, young Domingo loved his life in Mexico City. He enjoyed reading and studying the great European texts (Saint Augustine was a favourite) and was delighted to contribute to spreading the word of God – for his teachers had assured him that, in the eyes of God, all human souls were equally valuable. When he was only 16, he was considered so mature that he was made the manager of the small church of San Antonio Abad, which stood at the gate of the city where Moctezuma and Hernán Cortés had first come face to face in 1519. Domingo continued to be fascinated by his people's past, and made it his business to collect whatever indigenous histories he could find, whether they recounted the past of Chalco or of the Aztecs of Mexico City. When he went home to Chalco for visits, he began to collect papers there, too – often the ones he had seen during his childhood.

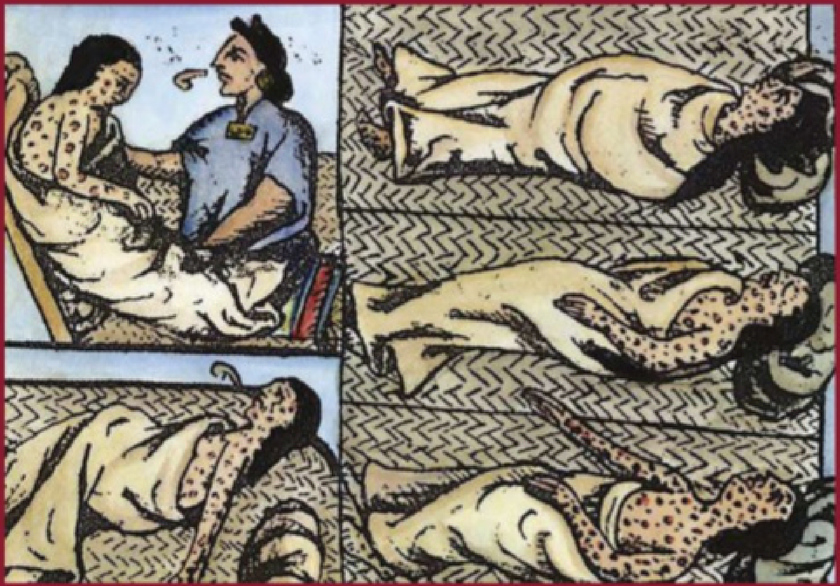
Domingo's father and grandmother both died in a horrifying epidemic of the early 1600s, when multiple diseases hit at once. They were not the only ones. The native population had fallen so dramatically over the course of the previous three



Mixed media The Mass of St Gregory, an artwork of 1539 created in Mexico City. Melding traditional indigenous and European techniques, it incorporates iridescent feathers (a common material in Aztec art) and gold sheet



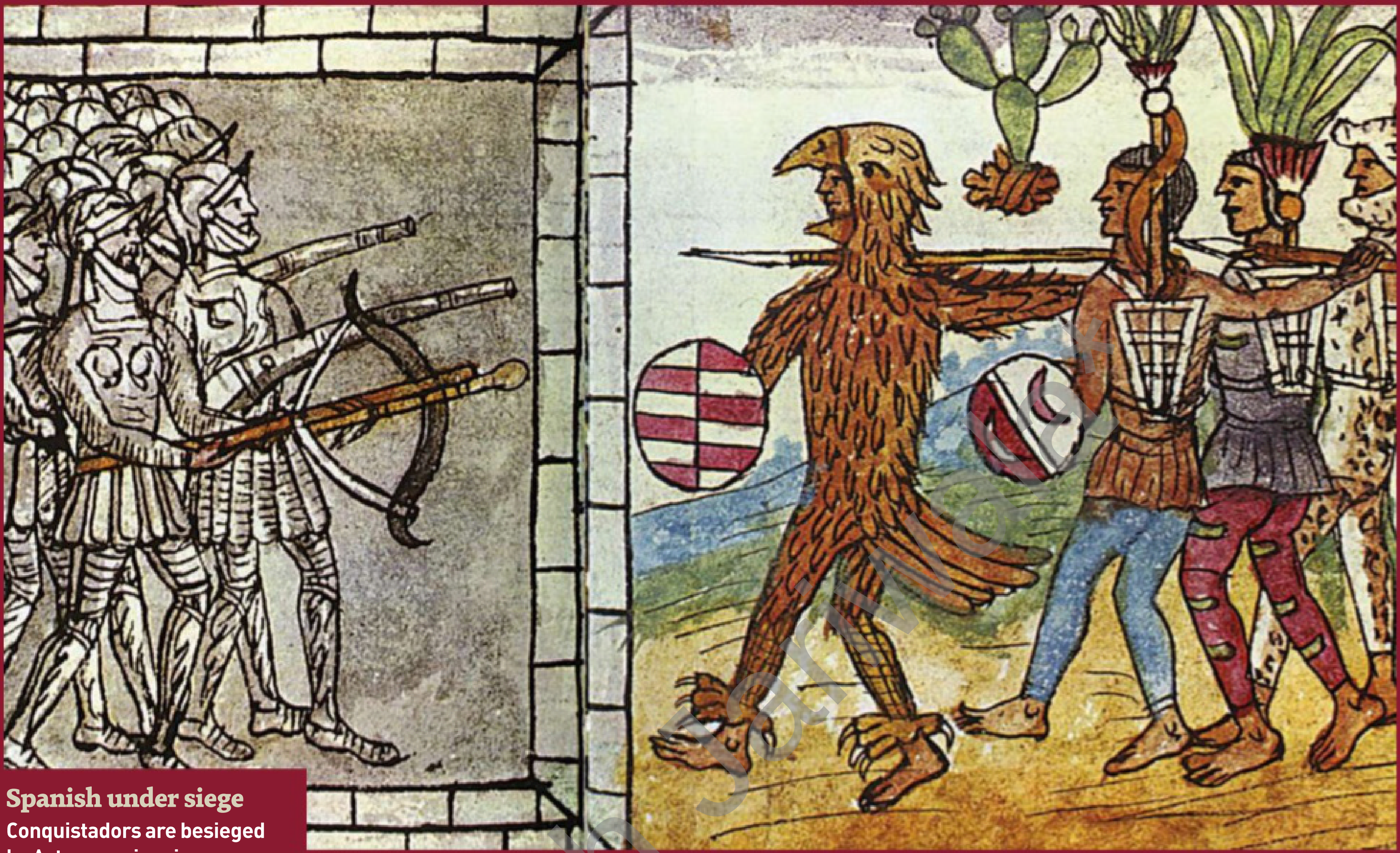
To defeat drought Aztecs make a ritual offering of birds to avert drought – a common and serious threat – depicted in an illustration from the 16th-century Tovar Codex



Aztec epidemic People of Tenochtitlán stricken by smallpox, in a 16th-century picture. Diseases carried to the Americas from Europe ravaged indigenous populations following the Spanish conquest

ALAMY/BRIDGEMAN/ MEAD ARCHIVES – LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

→



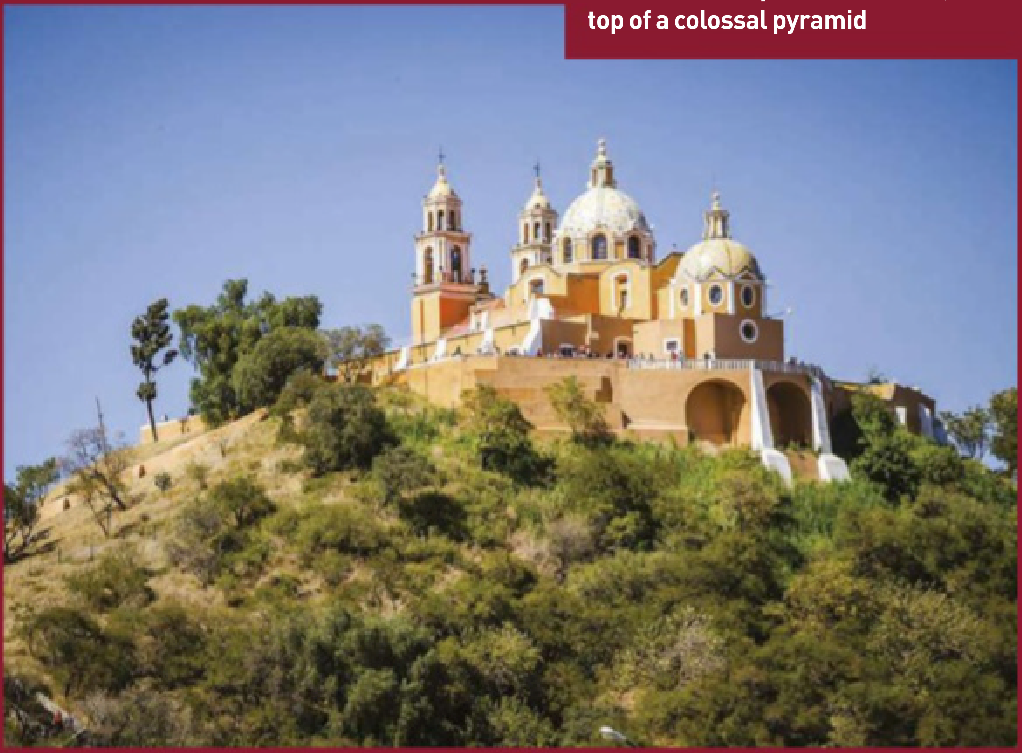
Spanish under siege

Conquistadors are besieged by Aztec warriors in a scene from the history compiled by Friar Diego Durán in c1581. Unlike many other writers, he drew on indigenous sources

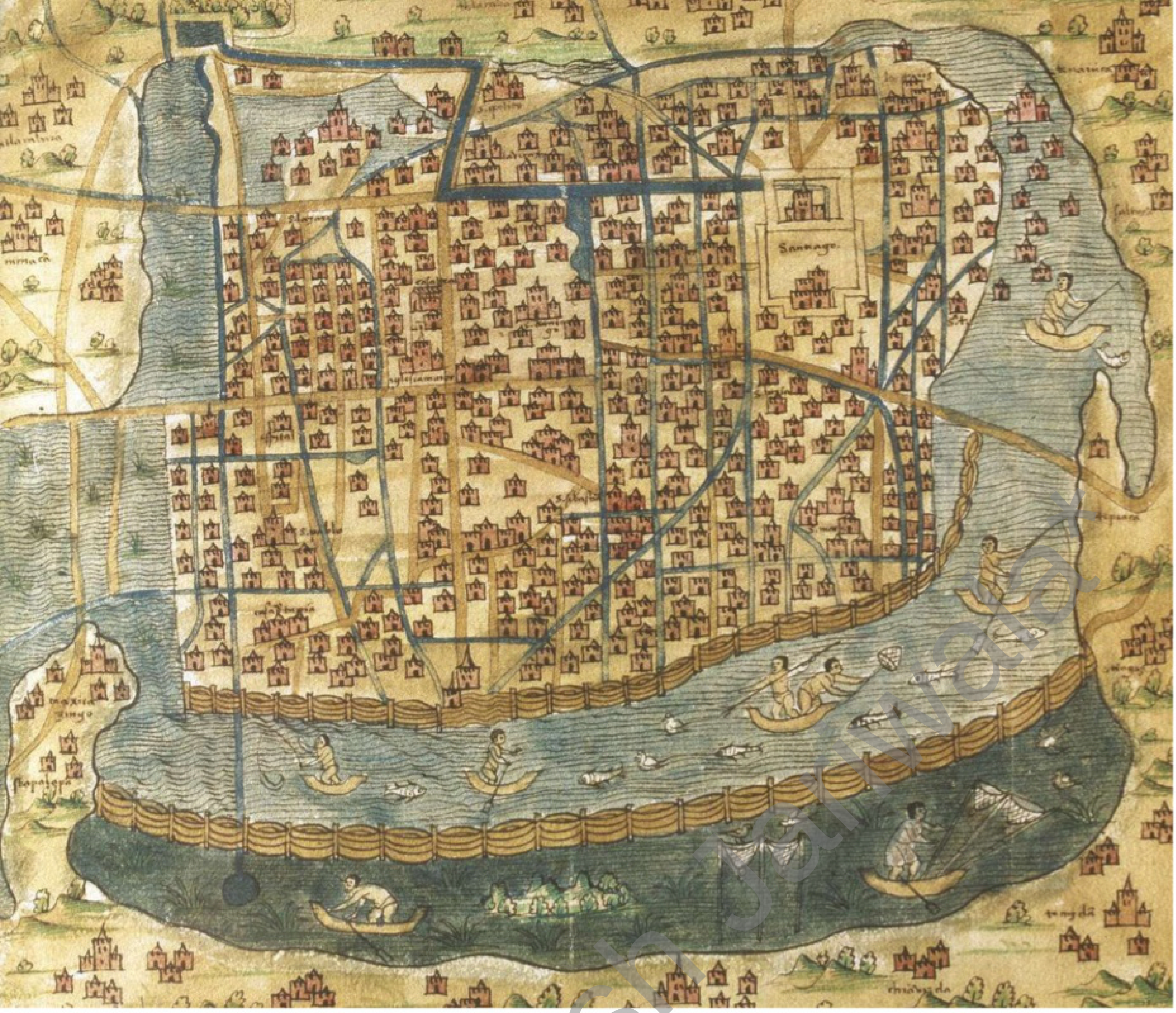
The church had been built on the site of the temple pyramid, where prisoners had occasionally been sacrificed to gain the favour of the old gods

Temple atop a temple

Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de los Remedios in Cholula, south-east of Mexico City. Like other Spanish colonial churches in the New World, it was built on the site of a pre-Columbian temple – in this case, on top of a colossal pyramid



GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY



Island life

A map of Mexico City, from a mid-16th-century Spanish atlas. The colonisers built their new capital on the site of the Aztec city Tenochtitlán, which had been razed during the conquest, and destroyed most literary sources predating their arrival

ALAMY

×Naresh Jaiswal

generations, ravaged by exposure to European diseases, that many people – Spanish and indigenous alike – believed that they might be on the road to extinction. Domingo thought it was possible. At the very least, it was becoming clear to him that there was almost no one left alive who could understand the painted glyphic histories of the pre-conquest years, and there were even relatively few people who could still truly comprehend the transcribed written histories, because their style was very different from that of European texts. In the evenings, when he had finished his work for the church, he took it upon himself to gather together all the native history he could find and write it out in one grand compendium. He wrote in Nahuatl, and also began to again style himself 'Chimalpahin' more regularly.

Victory from defeat

One of Chimalpahin's favourite stories from the sources concerned Shield Flower, daughter of a late-13th-century warrior chief. (She was sometimes given the even more valiant name Shield-Bearer Flower.) Her ancestors had arrived in the preceding century, among the last of a wave of migrants from the north, from regions known today as Arizona and New Mexico. When they arrived in the central valley of Mexico, they found that all of the best land had already been claimed, so they offered themselves for hire as mercenaries in other city-states' wars, living hand to mouth. Eventually, Shield Flower's father had had enough. He declared war on Culhuacan, a leading chiefdom, thinking that his people's place would be assured – if they won.

They lost. Shield Flower was among many women taken prisoner. She was selected to be sacrificed – a surprising choice: it was usually men who were thus killed. But their enemies dithered and delayed for days, apparently having no taste for the deed. The girl was brave – beyond brave, even. At length, she shouted to her enemies to bring her the feathers and the chalk, the ceremonial items needed to perform a ritual sacrifice. She would adorn herself and do the deed, if they were too cowardly to do so, she said. Someone brought her what she demanded and, as she died, she screamed at her enemies: "People of Culhuacan, I go to where my god lives. My people's descendants will all become great warriors – you will see!"

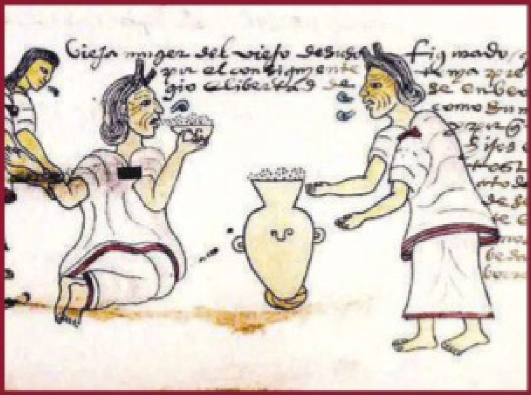
After she died, the Culhuas washed away her blood and ashes, but they could not wash away the dread her words had awakened. Indeed, Shield Flower's people went on to build the magnificent Aztec empire. She had inspired them to fight for their future, to master their fear and overcome their dependence and poverty, to work night and day to accomplish great things. She was quite a woman, Chimalpahin no doubt thought as he scribbled.

Chimalpahin wrote for over two decades, in an era when many other Nahuatl-speaking people likewise participated in

→

Legacy, lineage and laughter

Indigenous sources reveal that Aztec life wasn't as unfamiliar as we might expect



Aztec women wearing traditional clothing, as depicted in a contemporary illustration

The Aztecs had a history of their own

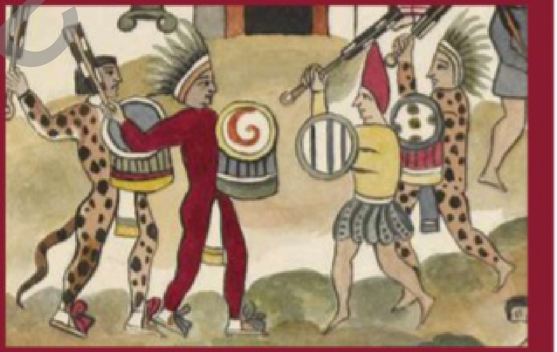
The indigenous historical annals reveal that prior to conquest, the Aztecs had a well-documented and detailed history, complete with wars, rising and falling kings, political marriages, palace plots and executions. Men always ruled, but women were important, for in a world where each prince had many wives, the question of the succession was extremely complex. Which of the wives' family backgrounds was powerful enough to ensure that one of *her* sons would inherit? The political intrigues never seemed to end. Henry VIII probably would have found it all very familiar!

Without these sources, we tend to imagine that the Aztecs' history is lost in the mists of time, or that they lived in an unchanging world. With these sources, for at least two generations before the conquest, we have historical facts at our fingertips.

They valued mutual respect

The Aztecs are famous for having conquered so many other city-states or altepetl (pronounced al-TE-pet) that we refer to their 'empire'. At the peak of their power, they did not take 'no' for an answer, so we have not tended to think of them as being especially talented at exhibiting mutual respect. But indigenous sources reveal that, as with all Nahuatl-speaking cultures, each altepetl was very careful to ensure that all parts of the community felt included and none overly burdened.

For example, in recitations of their people's history, each neighbourhood would designate a performer who would step forward to offer their perspective on events as one of a sequence of renditions. And each neighbourhood would take it in turn to assume responsibility for chores such as repairing the local temple or removing weeds from a port. In some Nahua city-states, even the chieftainship passed circularly among different family lines.



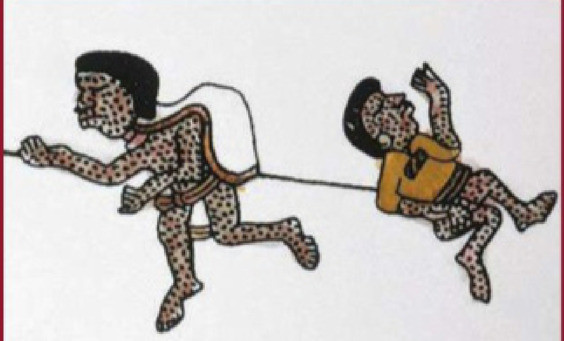
A 19th-century illustration of Aztecs in battle. The culture also had a compassionate side

They loved to make each other laugh

Archaeological evidence has suggested that the Aztecs were a sombre people, and this was true in some regards and at some moments. But Nahuatl-language sources have taught us that they also loved a good joke. In their myth-history recounting the deep past, one of the worst kings, a man who caused terrible rifts and wars among the people, was nicknamed Huemac (WAY-mak), which means 'big gift'. Some gift he was! Funny names weren't just for kings, either. One little girl hated baths so much that she was nicknamed 'She's-not-a-Fish'.

Another story tells of a local chief who was nearly driven crazy when his enemies arrived, because they persisted in cooking savoury ducks, whose delicious smell rose up to him on his hill and reminded him how hungry he was. When the people gathered for performances of their history, scenes like this would have been especially welcome.

Naresh Sriwala



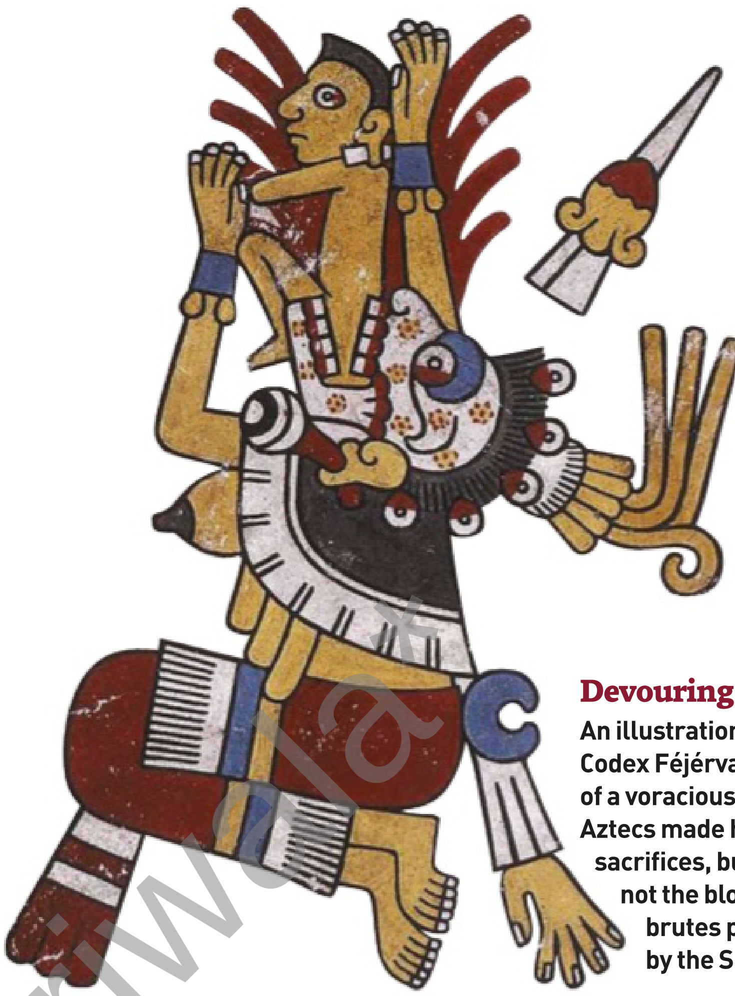
An Aztec depiction of victims of smallpox – a disease that devastated its communities

They had their own fear of epidemics

European diseases brought devastation to the New World because none of the people there had acquired any immunity to them. Smallpox had an especially high rate of mortality, and the Mesoamericans were among the first to suffer. Nahuatl-language sources demonstrate that before the conquest, when a person lay dying, the single most important element was to know that he or she would be remembered by loved ones and their descendants. Thus, when the epidemics began and children were taken in large numbers, destroying hope for posterity, the pain was almost unfathomable. In a record that one man kept in the midst of a later whooping cough epidemic, listing each person who died in his community, he wrote one Sunday, "No one's child died today."

GETTY IMAGES/AKG-IMAGES/ALAMY/TOPFOTO

We have been taught that the Aztecs were a nasty, brutish people – but the texts demonstrate that they loved a good joke and a compelling story



Devouring deity
An illustration from the Codex Féjérvary Mayer of a voracious god. The Aztecs made human sacrifices, but were not the bloodthirsty brutes portrayed by the Spanish

BRIDGEMAN

the writing of their forebears' histories, based on the old sources they still had at their disposal. For years afterwards their families treasured their work, but by the 18th century many of the native historians' descendants were selling their works to European collectors. Some ended up in Mexico City, while others landed in Spain, France or England. Some of Chimalpahin's most important papers were found in the 1980s in the collection of Britain's Bible Society, housed in Cambridge University Library; in 2014 they were repatriated to Mexico, to the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia. His record of his own time has been translated into English, and is available to read as *Annals of His Time: Don Domingo de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin*, edited by James Lockhart, Susan Schroeder and Doris Namala (Stanford, 2006).

Revisiting indigenous annals

At first, scholars paid little attention to what they called the 'indigenous annals' because, by western standards, they were difficult to understand. Parts of some were translated into European languages, but still they seemed strange, and little use was made of them except to date certain events or to name certain kings.

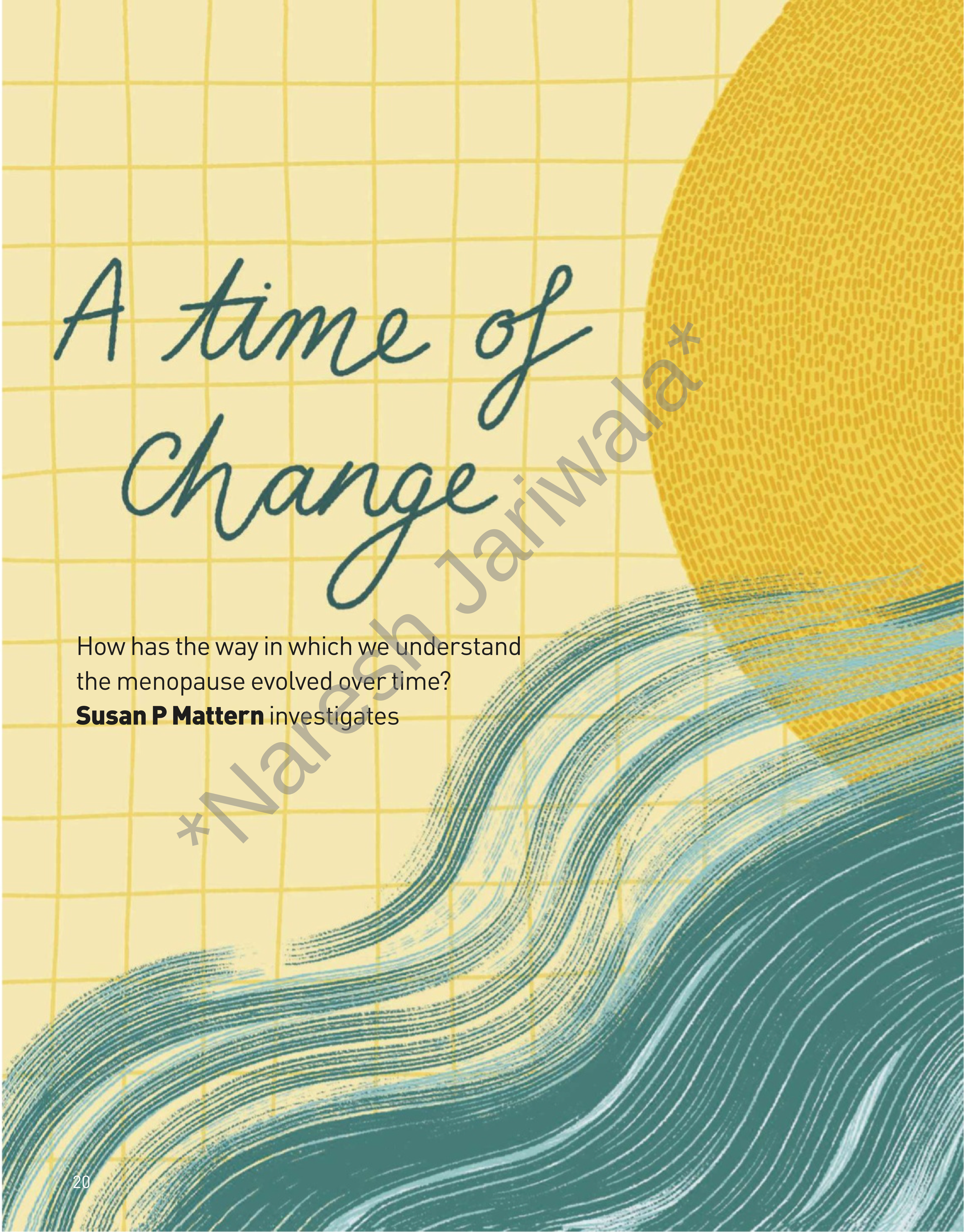
Only in the past generation have we been able to make much sense of them, as scholars have become able to read not just one but many sets of such annals, and comprehension of classical-era Nahuatl has improved – partly because living speakers were finally asked for help. We can now see the patterns, and recognise Nahuatl modes of telling history. At the time the stories were first told, they made sense to the listeners and little or no explanation was needed, but in modern times we have had to work hard to figure out what they meant. Occasionally, Chimalpahin helps us out by including explanations here and there, but he doesn't always do so. And, though he was the most prolific writer, he was not the only one.

The Aztecs and their allies who emerge from these documents bear little resemblance to the people described in Spanish texts of the colonial era upon which historians have, until now, mostly relied. The Spaniards were intent on proving that the Mesoamericans deserved to be defeated; moreover, since they didn't speak the local language, the Spanish often had no way of understanding what was really going on. We have been taught that the Aztecs were a nasty, brutish people intent on destroying others, who suddenly became convinced that Cortés was a god and thus were content to relinquish power.

In fact, the Aztecs were relative newcomers to the region. On first arrival in central Mexico, they had had no land and few resources. Eventually, they began to win some wars, but hunger still dogged them until they launched an imperialistic campaign that left them almost in sole charge of much of Mexico. Like other people in powerful positions, they sometimes behaved badly, by sacrificing many enemies to make a political point. They saw themselves as people who had always demonstrated courage and made the best of their situation, and they weren't going to turn back, nor allow themselves to be defeated again; they had Shield Flower's prophecy to live up to.

Texts such as those by Chimalpahin demonstrate that the Aztecs loved a good joke and appreciated a compelling story. After the Spaniards came, they certainly never believed that Hernán Cortés was a god; rather, they knew that they had lost a very human war. In the history they knew, that was a rather old human story. Chimalpahin, a devout Christian and a good man, felt respect and admiration for his forebears and, the more he learned about them, the sentiment only grew. 🌐

Camilla Townsend is distinguished professor of history at Rutgers University, New Jersey, and author of *Fifth Sun: A New History of the Aztecs* (Oxford University Press, 2019)



A time of Change

How has the way in which we understand the menopause evolved over time? **Susan P Mattern** investigates

→

ILLUSTRATION BY **MEGAN REDDI**

It may seem surprising that a condition that will affect half of the human population during part of their lives remained unnamed for so long. Yet the word 'menopause' was invented as recently as 1821, by French doctor Charles-Pierre-Louis de Gardanne. True, the concept was not original to him; by the time his book *De la ménopause, ou de l'âge critique des femmes (Menopause, or the critical age of women)* appeared in print, the idea he described was about 100 years old, though it had lacked a name.

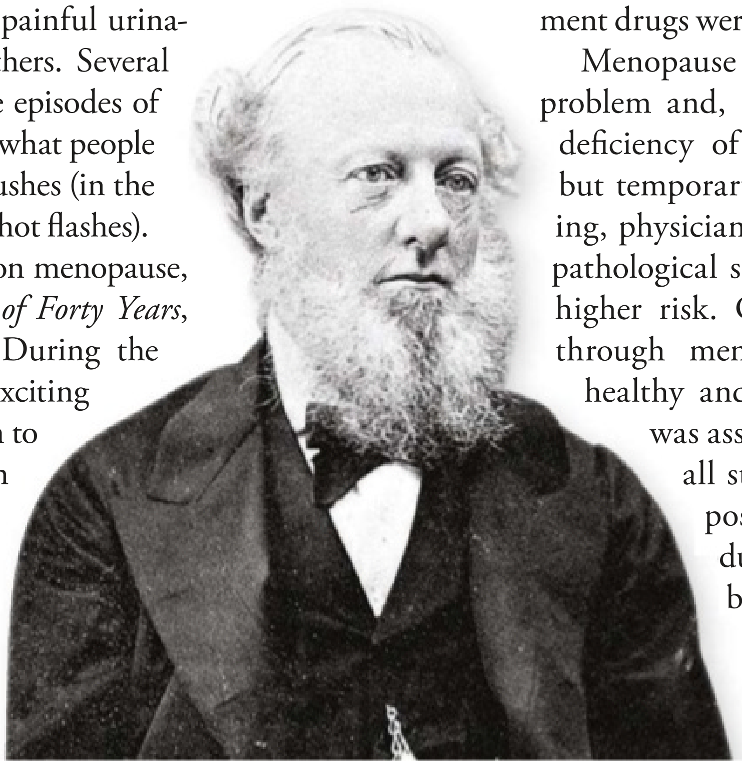
Around 1700, doctors began to write about a condition they called "the end of menstruation as the time for the beginning of various diseases", "the cessation of menstruation, and the problems that it may cause", and the "cessation of the periodical discharge, in the decline of life, and the disorders arising from that critical change of constitution." In other words, they wrote about a syndrome of symptoms and problems affecting one gender – women – at a certain time of life.

This was not the only syndrome of this kind recognised in professional medicine and popular culture. Many syndromes were staple features of the early modern European medical imagination, including 'hysterical suffocation' (called by several different names in this period), melancholia, nymphomania, and chlorosis or 'green sickness', a condition parallel to menopause in some ways, thought to affect adolescent girls. Chlorosis appeared in the medical literature earlier than menopause, beginning in the 16th century. At that time, there was still virtually no mention of a syndrome associated with the end of menstruation in European culture, or in any culture that produced a written medical tradition.

Early medical writers on menopause associated a huge variety of symptoms and conditions with the newly named syndrome, some of them very severe. De Gardanne's book lists several dozen "illnesses that are typically observed around the time of menopause," including fevers, wasting, ulcerations of the skin, cancers, haemorrhoids, coughing up blood, hepatitis, strangury (slow and painful urination), epileptic seizures and many others. Several physicians from the same era describe episodes of flushing and sweating that sound like what people in the modern world would call hot flushes (in the United States, more commonly called hot flashes).

The first popular advice literature on menopause, with such titles as *Advice to Women of Forty Years*, appeared in the mid-18th century. During the 19th century, as doctors made exciting discoveries about the nerves and began to locate the cause of many disorders in the nervous system and brain, behavioural symptoms become more prominent in writing about menopause.

Early medical writers on menopause associated a huge variety of symptoms and conditions with the newly named syndrome, some of them very severe



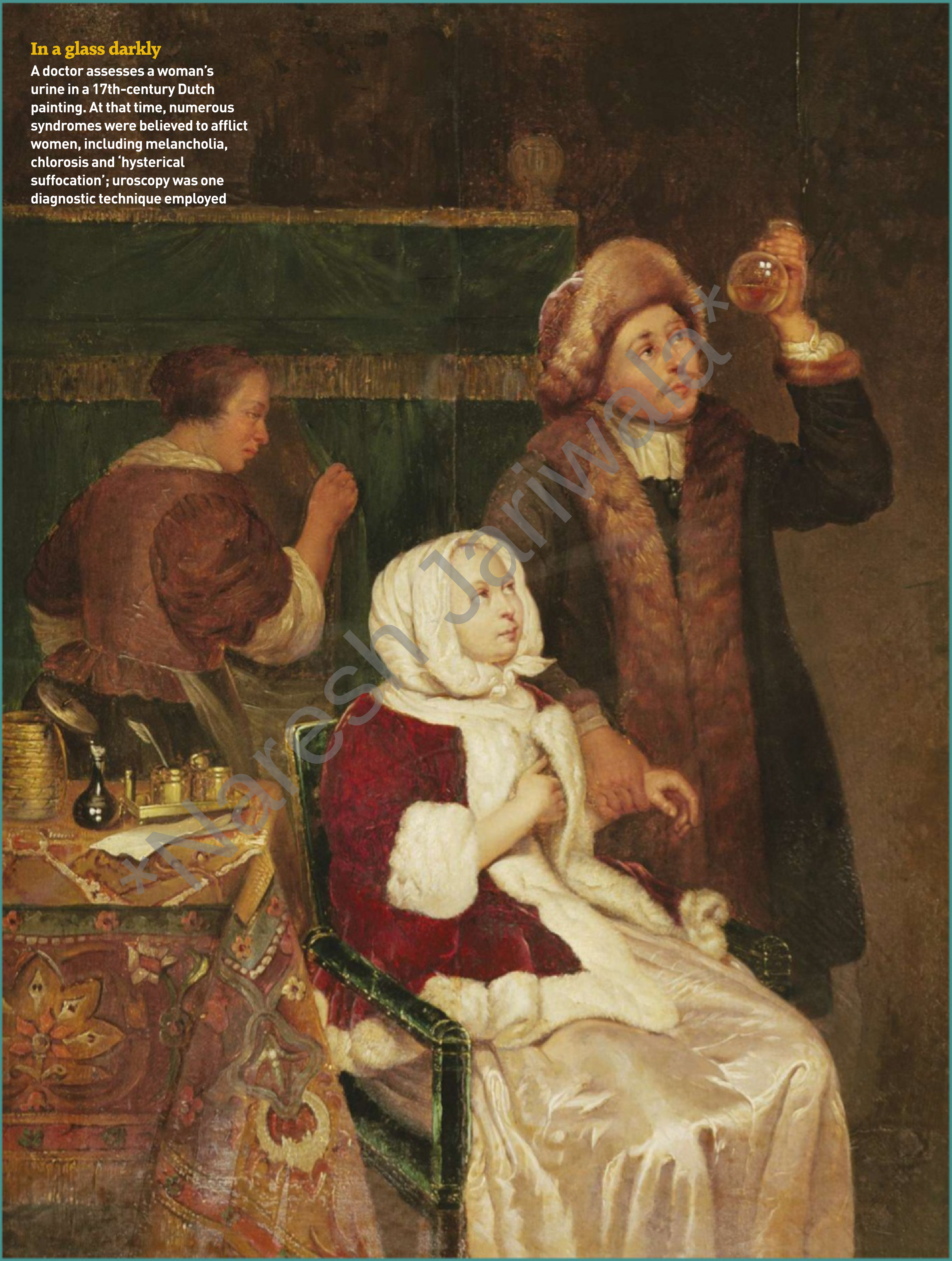
Doctor Edward Tilt, author of the first full-length book on menopause in English, pictured in 1861. He quantified symptoms such as "nervous irritability"

WELLCOME IMAGES

Edward Tilt, author of the first full-length book on menopause in English – *The Change of Life in Health and Disease*, best known in its second edition of 1857 – thought that menopause could cause alcoholism or mania, and could even make women murderously violent. Tilt was among the first physicians to quantify the symptoms that he observed in his patients, the most common of which were flushes, haemorrhaging, "nervous irritability", different kinds of pain, and something he called "pseudo-narcotism", a sort of semi-vegetative cognitive state. In his view, menopause was a critical state of nervous irritation in which women's health was vulnerable but, once through that period, women could look forward to many years of robust good health.

In the 18th and 19th centuries physicians blamed menopause on plethora (the retention of blood) or, later, on the nerves. In the early 20th century, the science of endocrinology came into being with the identification of hormones: chemical signals produced in the ovaries and other glands, carried to remote regions of the body through the blood. Scientists isolated oestrogen, the primary female sex hormone, in 1929; within a decade, the first oestrogen replacement drugs were available.

Menopause became redefined as a hormonal problem and, in the long run, as a permanent deficiency of oestrogen. No longer a critical but temporary period of symptoms and suffering, physicians now described it as a persistent, pathological state of hormonal deprivation and higher risk. Gone was the notion that, once through menopause, women might become healthy and rejuvenated. Ovarian oestrogen was assumed to be important to health at all stages of a woman's adult life, and post-reproductive women didn't produce enough of it – or so physicians believed. This idea of menopause



In a glass darkly

A doctor assesses a woman's urine in a 17th-century Dutch painting. At that time, numerous syndromes were believed to afflict women, including melancholia, chlorosis and 'hysterical suffocation'; uroscopy was one diagnostic technique employed

BRIDGEMAN

→

Hormone replacement therapy, it was claimed, would enable women to preserve their youth, vigour, mental acuity and sexual attractiveness

as a deficiency of oestrogen remains influential in medicine to this day.

Pharmaceutical companies promised that their oestrogen-replacement products would miraculously cure the many symptoms and conditions that people had, by then, been associating with menopause for about 200 years. Some went further. In 1966, US physician Robert Wilson (whose research was mostly funded by the makers of Premarin, the best-selling oestrogen replacement therapy at the time), changed the conversation on menopause with the publication of his book *Feminine Forever*. He painted a lurid picture of the fate that awaited women past menopause, describing it as "a serious, painful, and often crippling disease". Comparing the effects of oestrogen on post-menopausal women to those of insulin for people with diabetes, he promised that hormone replacement therapy would enable women to preserve their youth, vigour, mental acuity and sexual attractiveness.

Another mid-20th-century trend began to link menopause specifically to depression. From early in its history, the syndrome of menopause had included behavioural and psychological symptoms. Freudian psychoanalysis, meanwhile, linked menopause to grief, loss and mortification. Helene Deutsch, in her book *The Psychology of Women* published in 1944–45, was especially influential; she began her epilogue on 'The Climacterium' with the pronouncement that "with the cessation of this function [menstruation], she [woman] ends her service to the species". The term 'involutional melancholia' (or 'involutional psychosis') had already been coined to describe a depressive disease thought to be associated with menopause.

Exporting understanding

As the idea of menopause became established in modern medicine, it was exported around the world. For example, when China's Maoist government was modernising Chinese medicine (creating the system now known as Traditional Chinese Medicine), a chapter on menopause was added to the second edition of the official textbook on gynaecology in 1964. There is little evidence that Chinese medicine or culture included a concept of menopause as a medical problem before then.

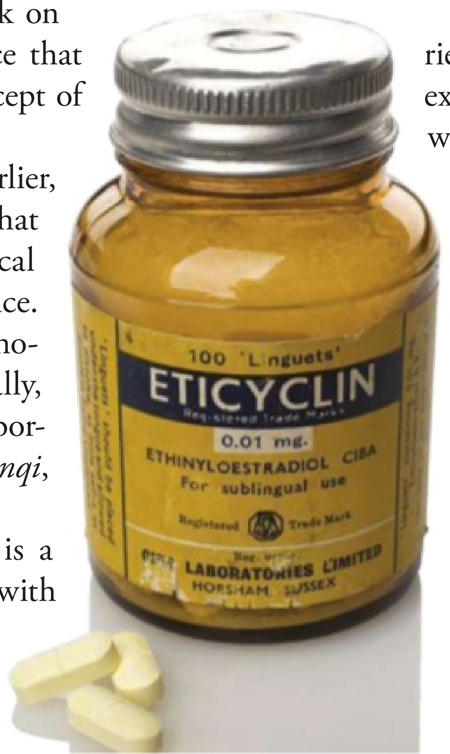
The concept came to Japan somewhat earlier, around the turn of the 20th century, after that country had ended its self-imposed geopolitical isolation and opened its doors to western science. The term *konenki* was coined to signify menopause as it was described in western – especially, German – medical literature. The Chinese borrowed their word for menopause, *gengnianqi*, from the Japanese *konenki*.

Over time, the notion that menopause is a deficiency condition that can be cured with replacement oestrogen has not held up as well as physicians such as Wilson expected; oestrogen turned out not to be the wonder drug they promised. Efforts to treat 'involutional melancholia' with oestrogen proved ineffective. The disappointing results of The Women's Health Initiative (WHI), a massive study designed to test the effects of prescribing hormonal supplementation to all women by default, have been well reported. This practice of prescribing hormones to prevent health problems was a logical consequence of the oestrogen-deficiency model of menopause; in 2002 alone, 90 million prescriptions for hormone therapy were written in the United States. But the WHI ended early that year, because the risks of treatment seemed to outweigh the benefits.

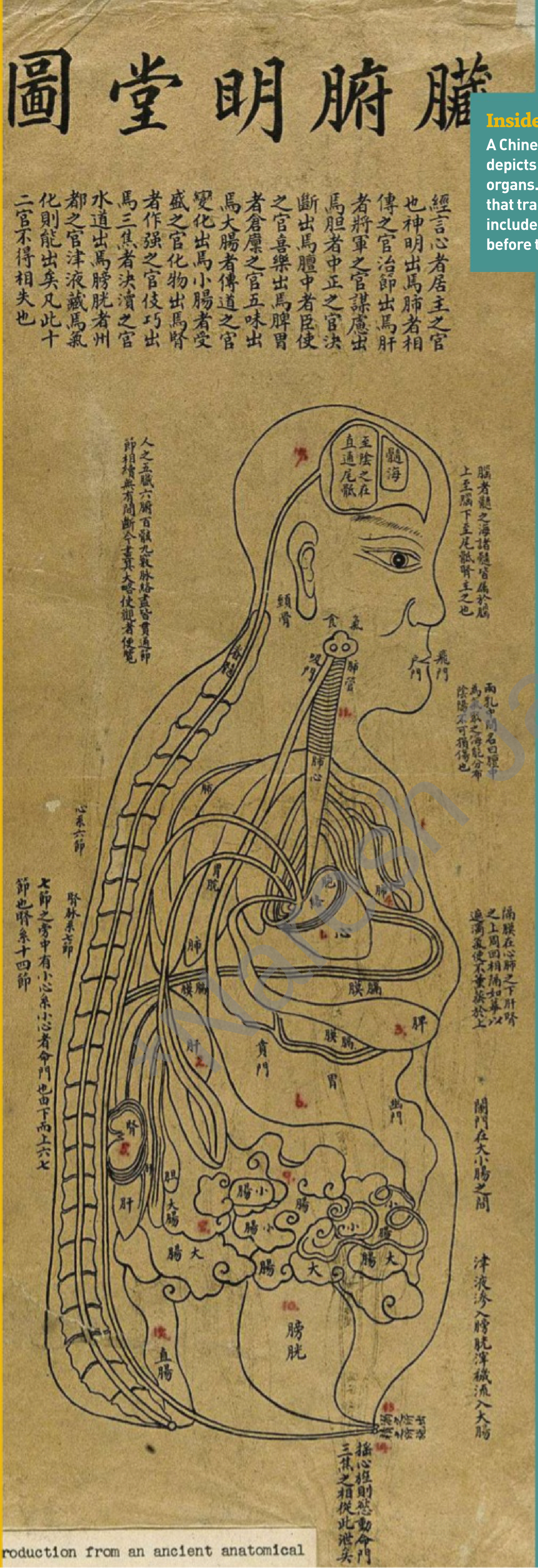
Today, many researchers continue to study physical, cognitive and behavioural symptoms thought to be associated with menopause, but without understanding the history of the ideas and assumptions on which their research is based. Furthermore, new research in the fields of anthropology and psychiatry might change some of those assumptions. Early modern syndromes were not purely literary or imaginary. Real people suffered real problems; they wrote about them in letters and diaries, and doctors described them in case histories. But culture played a big role in shaping their experiences. Today, transcultural psychiatrists study what are sometimes called 'cultural syndromes' or 'distress syndromes', and have proposed intriguing and convincing models of how they work.

Menopause the syndrome – the collection of symptoms – has a lot in common with distress syndromes worldwide. Symptoms of distress syndromes are of a kind that overlap with the physiological effects of anxiety or fear – the 'fight–flight' response that is also called sympathetic nervous system arousal. This is a broad cluster of phenomena including heating and flushing sensations, heart palpitations, chilling of the extremities, pain,

The oestrogen substitute eticyclin. Since the mid-20th century, such compounds have been prescribed to millions of women to treat symptoms of menopause

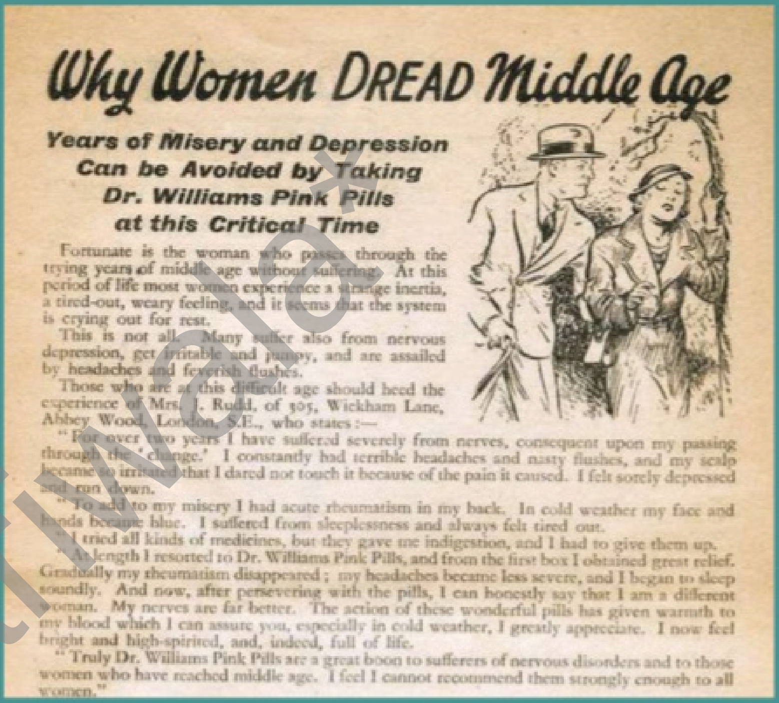


WELLCOME IMAGES


臟腑明堂圖
經言心者居主之官也神明出馬肺者相傳之官治節出馬肝者將軍之官謀慮出馬胆者中正之官決斷出馬膻中者臣使之官喜樂出馬脾胃者倉廩之官五味出馬大腸者傳道之官變化出馬小腸者受盛之官化物出馬腎者作强之官伎巧出馬三焦者決瀆之官水道出馬膀胱者州都之官津液藏馬氣化則能出矣凡此十二官不得相失也
髓海
心
肺
肝
脾
胃
膀胱
直腸
小腸
大腸
roduction from an ancient anatomical

Inside story

A Chinese anatomical woodcut depicts a woman's internal organs. There is little evidence that traditional Chinese medicine included a concept of menopause before the mid-20th century



Why Women DREAD Middle Age

Years of Misery and Depression Can be Avoided by Taking Dr. Williams Pink Pills at this Critical Time

Fortunate is the woman who passes through the trying years of middle age without suffering. At this period of life most women experience a strange inertia, a tired-out, weary feeling, and it seems that the system is crying out for rest.

This is not all. Many suffer also from nervous depression, get irritable and jumpy, and are assailed by headaches and feverish flushes.

Those who are at this difficult age should heed the experience of Mrs. J. Rudd, of 305, Wickham Lane, Abbey Wood, London, S.E., who states :—

"For over two years I have suffered severely from nerves, consequent upon my passing through the 'change.' I constantly had terrible headaches and nasty flushes, and my scalp became so irritated that I dared not touch it because of the pain it caused. I felt sorely depressed and run down.

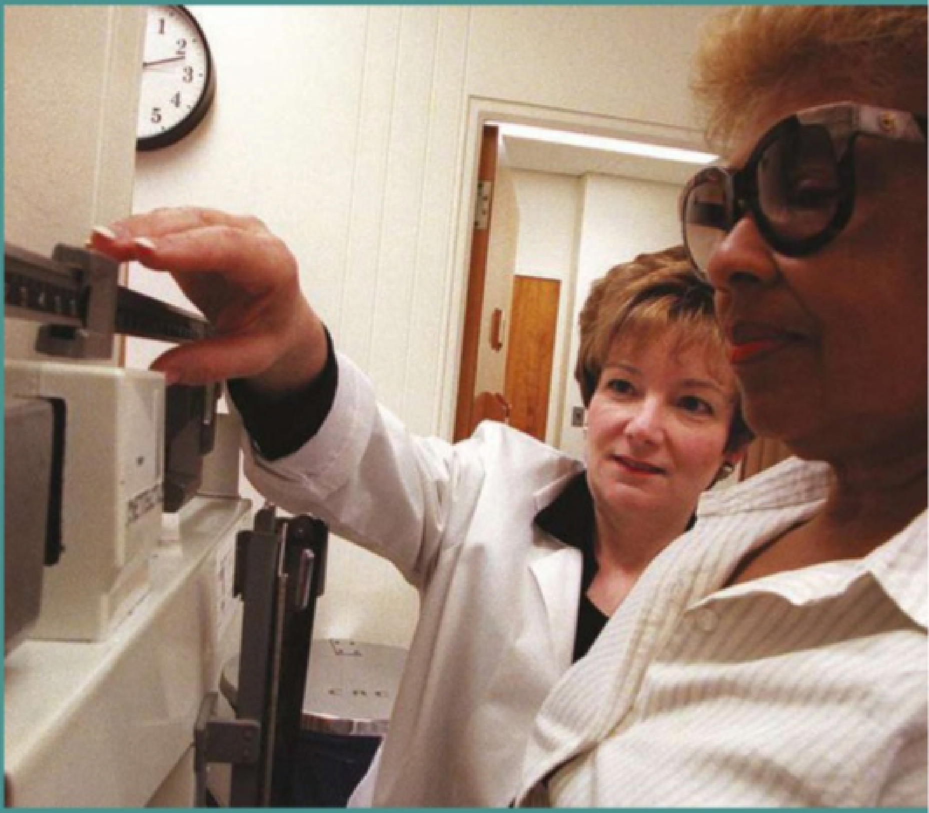
"To add to my misery I had acute rheumatism in my back. In cold weather my face and hands became blue. I suffered from sleeplessness and always felt tired out.

"I tried all kinds of medicines, but they gave me indigestion, and I had to give them up.

"At length I resorted to Dr. Williams Pink Pills, and from the first box I obtained great relief. Gradually my rheumatism disappeared ; my headaches became less severe, and I began to sleep soundly. And now, after persevering with the pills, I can honestly say that I am a different woman. My nerves are far better. The action of these wonderful pills has given warmth to my blood which I can assure you, especially in cold weather, I greatly appreciate. I now feel bright and high-spirited, and, indeed, full of life.

"Truly Dr. Williams Pink Pills are a great boon to sufferers of nervous disorders and to those women who have reached middle age. I feel I cannot recommend them strongly enough to all women."

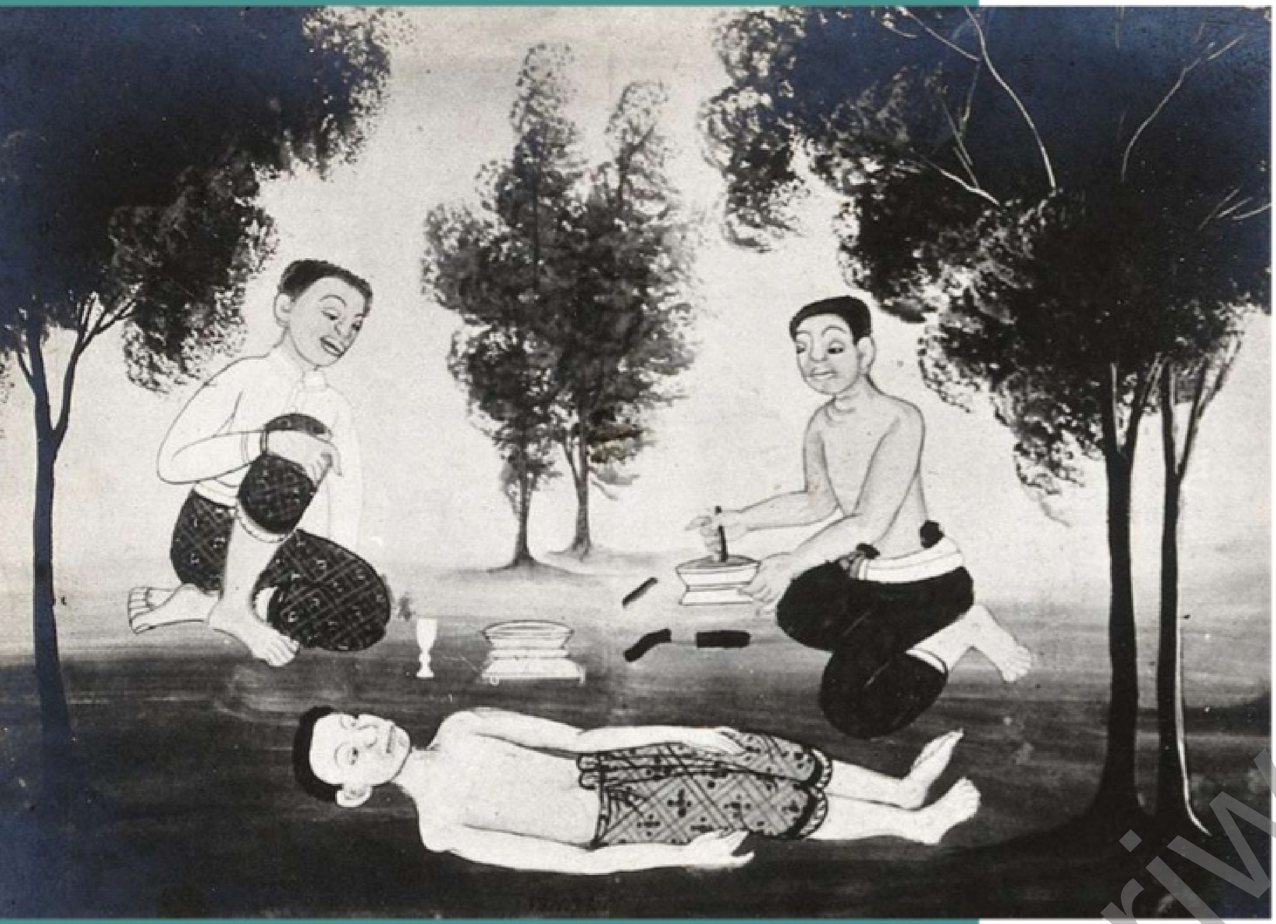
Combatting the 'change' An early 20th-century advert for Dr Williams Pink Pills extols their benefits for women of a "difficult age" in alleviating depression, feverish flushes and "nerves"



Weighing the evidence A nurse assesses a participant in the Women's Health Initiative. The results of this large American study raised questions about the overall health benefits of long-term prescription of hormone replacement therapy

WELLCOME IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES/MARY EVANS

→



Shaping a syndrome

Medical treatment, shown in a Khmer painting. Local anxieties about characteristic symptoms tend to shape cultural syndromes such as *kyol goeu* in Cambodia, historically believed to be caused by a blockage of the flow of the body's essential wind

WELLCOME IMAGES

sleep problems, loss of appetite, gastric problems, shakiness, muscle tension, attention and memory problems, loss of appetite and shortness of breath. Most symptoms attributed to menopause on, for example, checklists used by medical researchers, fall into this category.

Dealing with distress

Distress syndromes are also tied to culture-specific (ethnophysiological) ideas of what conditions exist, what their symptoms are, and what causes them. For each cultural syndrome, the symptoms thought most characteristic and important in the ethnophysiological model tend to be amplified by attention and anxiety about them, so that the syndrome takes a very specific shape. For example, the Cambodian syndrome *kyol goeu* is believed to be caused by a blockage of the flow of the body's essential wind, often in the neck, and neck pain is an important sign of the illness and a trigger for an attack. Distress syndromes such as *kyol goeu* are often characterised by brief, episodic attacks resembling seizures or cardiac events – similar to western psychiatry's Panic Attack – with acute and rapidly escalating symptoms of sympathetic nervous system arousal (palpitations, shortness of breath, sweating or chills, and so forth).

Another striking case of a cultural syndrome is the ancient Greek concept of 'hysterical suffocation' – a concept attested as early as the third century BC and that seems to have remained vital for at least 1,000 years, when medical encyclopaedists continued to preserve and update the tradition on this condition. The idea that a woman's uterus (*hystera*, in Greek) could move around the body and cause problems is attested in Greek medical writing and in popular culture – for example, on amulets urging the uterus to stay put – throughout that period. Women who experienced choking sensations might well believe they were in danger of choking to death on their own wombs, and a well-attested tradition describes the kind of attack that might follow – in this case, a dead faint, chilling of the extremities, deafness, inability to talk, and other symptoms. Early or chronic signs of hysterical suffocation might include muscle tension, headache, fatigue and dizziness.

Because both the chronic and the acute symptoms of hysterical suffocation were of the kind exacerbated by sympathetic nervous system arousal – and a sensation of choking is a common cross-cultural symptom of intense anxiety – it seems likely that the tradition reports on a real phenomenon similar to modern *kyol goeu* and other cultural syndromes, and similar, in some ways, to menopause.

Western medicine acknowledges a condition called menopause, with symptoms including insomnia, 'irritability', memory problems and different kinds of pain, caused by a fluctuating or deficient supply of oestrogen. Because we've heard that menopause might cause such sensations, we are more likely to notice them and, consciously or unconsciously, to link them to the cultural construct 'menopause'. Because these kinds of symptoms are easily amplified by anxious arousal, they will tend to become more frequent and more distressing, creating a syndrome of distinct character. The hot flushes typical of the western concept of menopause bear striking similarities to the episodic fits, spells or seizures typical of other cultural syndromes; hot flushes as described in modern medical literature share many symptoms in common with Panic Attack, and many people suffering a western hot flush would meet criteria for that condition.

Distress syndromes are not 'all in the head'; they can cause severe physical suffering, both acute and chronic, and they can be pervasive. But culture is an important input into how these syndromes are experienced. There's a case to be made that in ignoring the cultural context of menopausal syndrome, we fail to understand it, and therefore to address it effectively.

Susan P Mattern is distinguished research professor in the Department of History at the University of Georgia. Her latest book is *The Slow Moon Climbs: The Science, History, and Meaning of Menopause* (Princeton, 2019)

HISTORY
THE FALL OF ROMAN BRITAIN

Naresh Jaiswa

BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE

SAVE 50%

when you subscribe
to *BBC History
Magazine*

- From just £35.75 for 13 issues – **saving 50%** off the shop price*
- Or subscribe to our **Print & Digital Bundle** and pay every 6 issues (online orders only)
- **Exclusive subscriber discounts** on tickets to *BBC History Magazine* events
- **FREE UK delivery** direct to your door or device

EASY WAYS TO ORDER

ORDER ONLINE
www.buysubscriptions.com/HTP252

☎ **BY PHONE**
03330 162 115+
PLEASE QUOTE HTP252

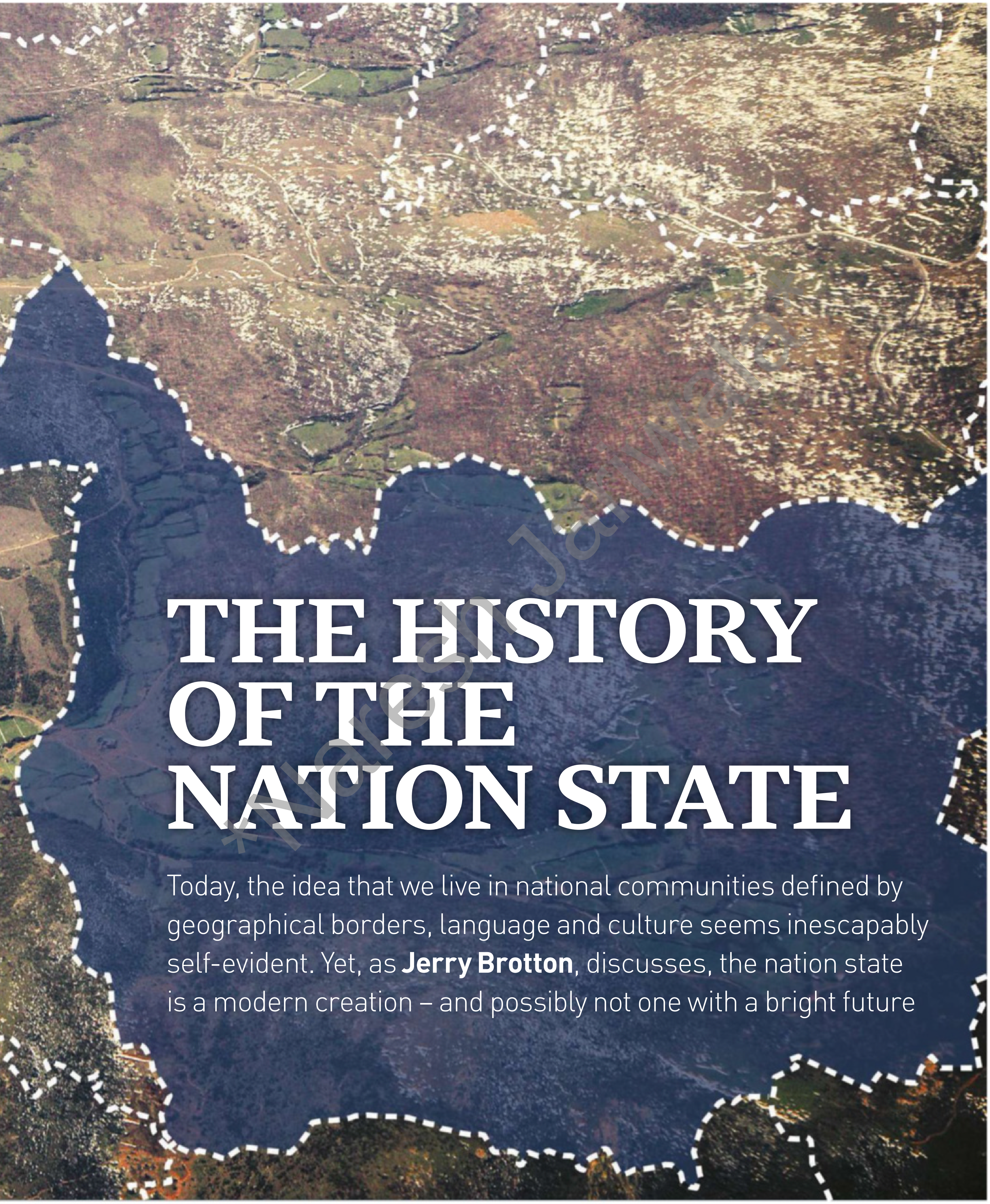
*50% saving is available to UK Direct Debit orders only. Your subscription will start with the next available issue. Offer ends 23 April 2020.
+Calls from landlines will cost up to 9p per minute. Call charges from mobile phones will cost between 3p and 55p per minute but are included in free call packages. Lines are open 8am–8pm weekdays and 9am–1pm Saturday. Overseas readers should call +44 1604 973 723

ALAMY

NATION STATES IN CRISIS

As the likes of Scotland and Catalonia consider independence, explore the **origins of nation states** – and the tensions within them – in an **18-page special section**

DREAMSTIME



THE HISTORY OF THE NATION STATE

Today, the idea that we live in national communities defined by geographical borders, language and culture seems inescapably self-evident. Yet, as **Jerry Brotton**, discusses, the nation state is a modern creation – and possibly not one with a bright future

→

Naresh JaiMala

There are 195 recognised independent states in the world. All but two are member states of the United Nations (UN). Some states, such as Taiwan, remain in limbo due to ongoing political disputes over their sovereignty. The vast majority of the global population, including indigenous peoples, are subject in some way to the laws of a nation state. And yet the nation is notoriously difficult to define. In the Oxford English Dictionary, a nation is listed as a "large aggregate of communities and individuals united by factors such as common descent, language, culture, history, or occupation of the same territory, so as to form a distinct people".

The nation has become the accepted political method of organising our modern public and private lives. We are all bound by national laws, which are in turn enshrined in international law through organisations such as the UN and the European Union (EU). But how did this simple and apparently obvious idea come to dominate the world and its political laws over recent centuries? And, as entities such as the UN and the EU are subject to increasing criticism from various quarters, is the sovereign nation state now entering a period of slow and painful decline – even disappearance – with the rise of economic globalisation?

One of the many contradictory aspects of the nation is that it is a relatively recent invention: most historians claim that it emerged as recently as the 19th century. Yet most nations claim or imagine themselves to have existed since ancient times: think of India, China or even England – the latter being a particularly troublesome example. The concept of the nation is usually regarded as a western-European invention, which is certainly where its earliest usage and application are recorded. It first appears in European vernaculars in the late 13th century, its name based on the Latin *natio* ('birth'), usually referring to a racial 'breed' or group rather than a political state.

States had, of course, already existed by this time. The Roman empire, with its attempt at centralised organisation, is the most obvious example. But the state is not necessarily a synonym for a nation. A state requires sovereignty, territory, governance and population, all of which existed under Rome. But a nation requires a common sense of collective unity and consciousness – 'Roman-ness' – which was felt by only a tiny minority of people under the control of Rome, whose native inhabitants defined themselves through a city rather than a nation or even empire.

The first mention of "Ingland the nacion" comes around 1300, and even Shakespeare's earliest use of 'nation' in the late 1590s has more of a religious and racial aspect than a political one. It is spoken by Shylock, the Jewish moneylender in *The Merchant of Venice*, who claims that the Christian Antonio "hates our sacred nation".

Port St Pere
LAC DE
GRAND LIEU
St Philbert

Mapping the land
A section of the *Carte de Cassini* (1789), a detailed map of the territory of France. Coinciding with the French Revolution, it provided a template for all national surveys

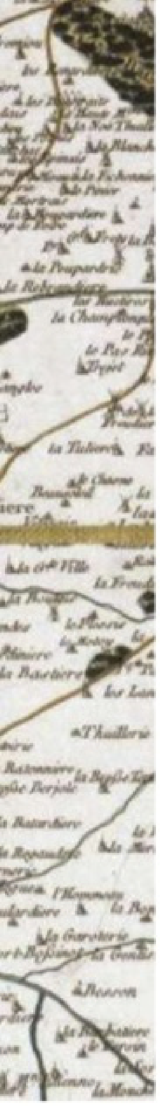
Indeed, Shakespeare provides an interesting example of the confusion that surrounds the history of nationhood. In *Richard II* (written c1595), John of Gaunt is given one of the most anthologised of all Shakespeare speeches, celebrating "this sceptr'd isle" as "This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England". But the princely Gaunt is actually describing England not as a nation but as a royal absolutist ("sceptred") state that is, according to him, being ruined by a king – Richard II.

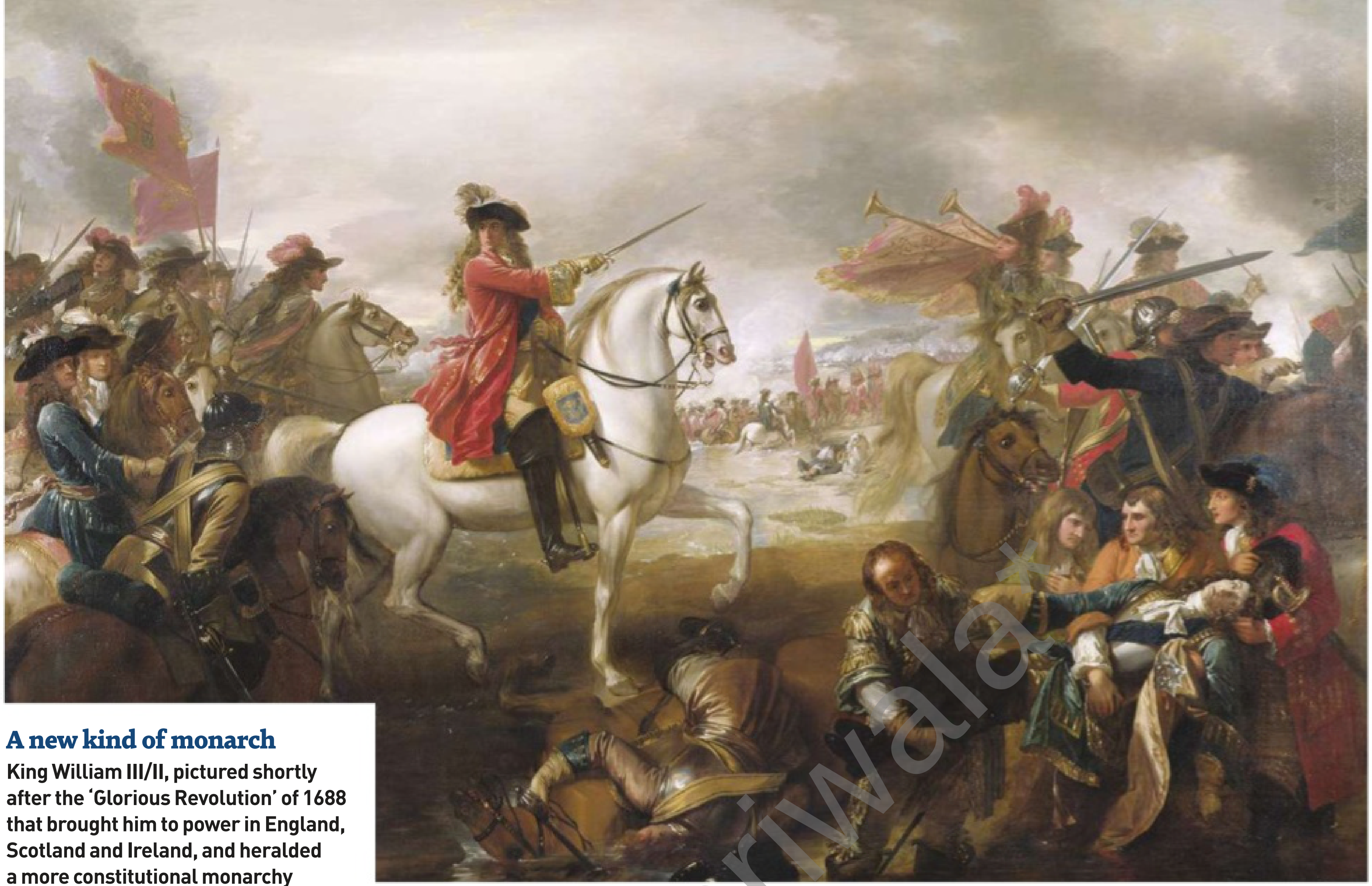
Like most European states prior to 1600, Tudor England operated as a dynastic state that drew inspiration from the classical empires of Egypt, Greece, Rome, Persia, China and the Ottomans. Around that time, collective identity was usually connected to an empire or religion. All were loosely grouped around sacred (as opposed to vernacular) languages: Latin, Arabic, Chinese, Pali. These languages were primarily used by elites that organised imperial and theological empires with cosmic centres such as Jerusalem, Mecca, Rome and Baghdad. Each empire was structured with porous and indistinct boundaries, where one empire faded into another

Between 1770 and 1789, a staggering 895 books were printed with the words 'nation' or 'national' in their titles

ALAMY

Naresh Jaiwala





A new kind of monarch
King William III/II, pictured shortly after the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 that brought him to power in England, Scotland and Ireland, and heralded a more constitutional monarchy

(leading to the armed conflicts that characterised so much of the medieval world).

An important shift in Europe came with the end of the centralised administration of the Holy Roman Empire (which, by the time it was formally dissolved by Napoleon in 1806, effectively comprised a number of individual, largely self-governing territories) and the spread of vernacular languages following the invention of the printing press in the 15th century. Once printed, books in English, German, French, Italian and Spanish began to shape the people who spoke and read them into cohesive groups at the expense of sacred languages such as Latin and Arabic that were mainly spread through manuscript culture. As a consequence, nationally imagined cultures began to slowly take shape from the late 16th century. With the disparate remains of a centralised state and the rise of vernacular languages rubbing up against older imperial and religious belonging, Europe began to coalesce – often painfully – into states that took on something of a national character.

National awareness

England was an interesting case in point. Henry VIII's split from Rome and creation of the Church of England was not an attempt to forge a national consciousness, but the unintended consequences were to create an identity – one with a vernacular language and geography, helpfully bounded by the sea rather than other states, that was recognisably national. Increasingly, local communities found themselves identifying with a place called 'England', even though it was still ruled by a monarch. This national awareness was only intensified by the civil wars of the mid-17th century, culminating in the so-called 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 that ushered in constitutional as opposed to absolutist monarchy. Over the subsequent decades, a national parliamentary system prevailed over an increasingly limited monarchy.

Another significant moment in mainland Europe was the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) that brought an end to the imperial wars of religion, including the Thirty Years' War, and which enshrined the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the European states involved. That treaty also coincided with the establishment of scientific techniques of measuring and mapping territory that enabled cartographers and diplomats to agree on national boundaries. It began the modern conception of national territory whereby, in sharp contrast to empires, sovereignty was established consistently over every inch (or centimetre) of the nation's territory. A glance at the change in state boundaries drawn on maps and atlases made in 1700 compared with earlier charts created in 1500 is startling: suddenly, national boundaries appear everywhere (though they could, inevitably, be subject to significant changes over the next three centuries).

Many of these changes created the conditions for what most historians see as the most decisive event in the history of the rise of the modern nation state: the French Revolution of 1789. The political opposition to the Ancien Régime of France's Bourbon dynasty drew on many of the developments over the previous 200 years of vernacularisation and state centralisation to make nationhood the main rallying cry of the revolutionaries. Between 1770 and 1789, a staggering 895 books were printed with 'nation' or 'national' in their titles. "The nation," wrote one revolutionary in 1789, "is prior to everything. It is the source of everything." It became a foundational principle of the republican state that "all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation".

One of the new republican nation's most compelling legacies was the completion of the *Carte de Cassini*, a monumental map

→

BRIDGEMAN

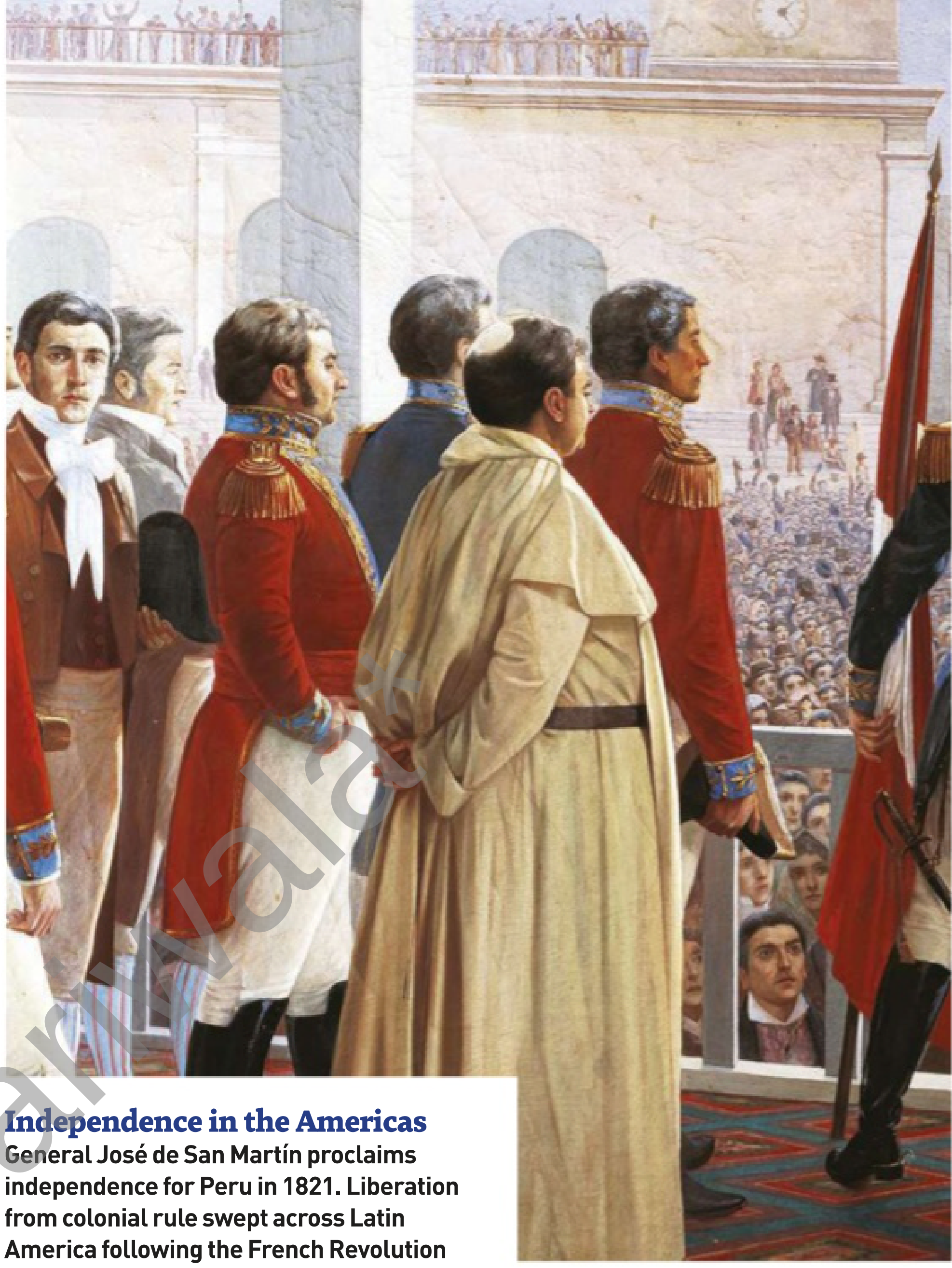
of the French nation created by generations of the Cassini map-making family. Using the latest scientific surveying methods, it showed the entire French nation printed on 180 sheets at a uniform scale of 1:86,400. One map, written in one language, showing one nation, it provided the template for all subsequent national surveys across the world.

The rest of the world quickly began to adopt the national principles established by the French Revolution in what is now considered the great age of nationalism. One of the most remarkable stories of the history of the nation state is how quickly it was adopted following 1789 – not in Europe but in South America. By the late 18th century, many of the Spanish colonies in the Americas had begun their struggles for independence, and the rallying cry of nationalism was at the vanguard of their demands for autonomy. In an extraordinary period of less than two decades between 1808 and 1826, virtually all of Latin America gained national independence from its European colonial masters. Influenced by the revolutions in France and America, and the wave of Enlightenment thinking that had swept Europe in the early 18th century, first Haiti (1804) then Colombia (1810), Venezuela (1811), Argentina (1816), Chile (1818), Peru and Mexico (1821), Brazil (1822) and Bolivia (in 1825, and named after one of the region's great liberation leaders, Simón Bolívar) proclaimed national independence.

The reasons for this sudden explosion of national independence remain the subject of considerable debate, but it was certainly not driven exclusively by mass populism from below. Many of the demands for autonomy were driven by relatively prosperous Creoles (people of European, in most cases Spanish, heritage born in the Americas) who were dissatisfied with European colonial rule yet shaped by many of its principles and institutions. A blueprint for national identity was inherited and implemented in South America, though the many differences between that continent and Europe – as well as an enduring colonial presence in places such as Cuba (until 1902) and the Guianas – have continued to leave the region bedevilled by political and economic instability.

When America inspired Europe

One of the many ironies of nationalism is that its next great wave occurred in Europe, where the idea was born but which by the early 19th century found inspiration in the revolutionary national struggles of South America. As the Habsburg and Ottoman empires began to unravel, calls for national independence emerged, particularly in eastern Europe in regions such as Serbia, Greece, Belgium and Poland, giving rise to a new noun: nationalism. The bourgeois revolutions of the mid-19th century were caused by a variety of different factors, but they all marched under the flag of national self-determination. Italy became a sovereign state in 1861 (though unification was completed only in 1871), and Germany achieved full national unification under Bismarck as recently as 1871.

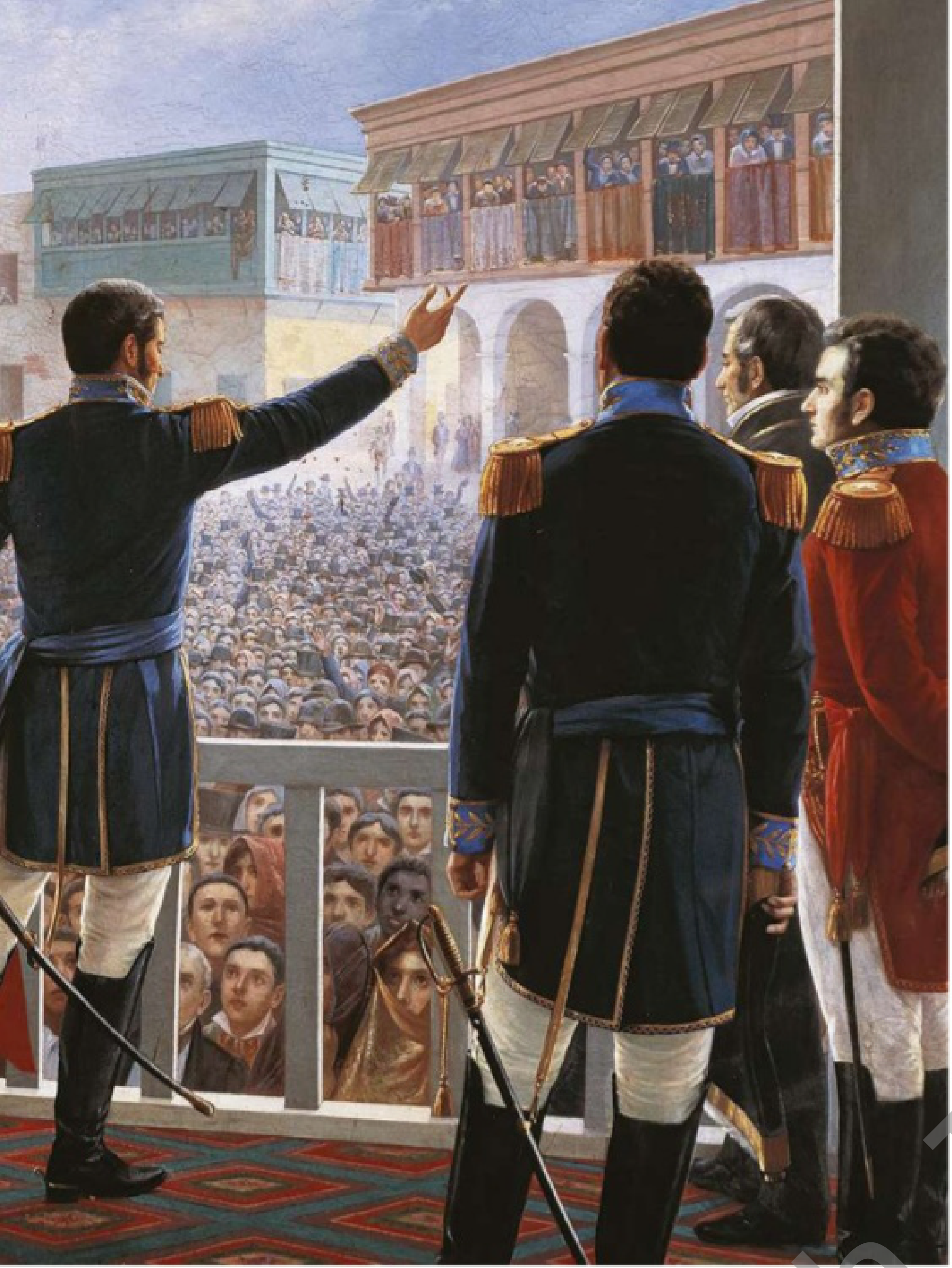


Independence in the Americas
General José de San Martín proclaims independence for Peru in 1821. Liberation from colonial rule swept across Latin America following the French Revolution

BRIDGEMAN

As much as the evolving national map of Europe led to the First World War, it was also clear in its aftermath that a redrawing of this map was required in an attempt to prevent further conflict in the name of nationalism. The creation of the League of Nations in 1920 was a consequence of the previous year's Treaty of Versailles, under the guidance of the US president Woodrow Wilson. The first international organisation designed to maintain peace and political stability across its 58 national member states (including Japan, a sign of the global reach of the concept of the nation state), and a forerunner of the United Nations, the League was both a noble idea and a significant failure. It was, ultimately, powerless to prevent the slide into the Second World War that was partly caused by the national divisions created by the treaties that had also created the League. Much of the subsequent history of 20th-century conflict reflects the contradictory aspirations that lie at the heart of national self-determination – liberty and freedom, yet at the expense of religious and ethnic exclusivity – which have so easily tipped over into warfare, ethnic cleansing, even genocide.

The problems are perhaps most clearly seen in Africa. Between 1957, when Ghana claimed independence from British colonial control, and 1962, when Algeria declared its independence from France, 24 African countries established national autonomy from former colonial masters. Yet the implementation of national sovereignty in the region was largely inherited from the same colonial administrations that created countries through



Post-independence tensions Rwandan children in a refugee camp in 1994, during the bloody civil war. In the 20th century, most newly independent African countries inherited territories defined arbitrarily by colonial administrations, leading to ethnic and religious tensions

Contradictory aspirations at the heart of national self-determination easily tip over into warfare, ethnic cleansing, even genocide

the mostly arbitrary process of drawing lines on a map during the 19th century, as Europe carved up the continent on its terms, regardless of the region's religious and ethnic composition. The endemic problems faced in Africa, from famine to corruption, civil wars and genocide in countries such as Rwanda, suggest that the sudden and cosmetic adoption of national self-determination does not work. However, such is the power of the philosophy of the nation state that few regions have come up with a different way of organising their political and cultural identity.

It is hard to assess the future of the nation, not least because we are still digesting the impact of the last great period of national independence that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The subsequent creation of a plethora of new nation states in eastern Europe, especially in the former Yugoslavia, led to renewed violence, epitomised in the horrors of the Kosovan war (1998–99). Today, the initial aspirations of 19th-century national autonomy built on openness appear to have evaporated, replaced instead by an intolerant demand for ethnic and religious exclusivity. The darkest version of this flavour of nationalism is encapsulated in Czech historian Miroslav Hroch's argument that it is based on a belief that "when society fails, the nation [ethnic group] appears as the ultimate guarantee".

Today, though – after decades of globalisation inspired by multinational organisations pursuing autonomous online technology, the deregulation of legal and financial systems and the unimpeded flow of capital, with little or no concern for national sovereignty – we may now be witnessing the beginning of the slow demise of the nation state. By 2017, an estimated 94% or US$250 billion of Apple's cash reserves – more than the combined foreign reserves of the British government – were held offshore, highlighting a real danger that multinational companies can exert greater power over political life than nation states.

In the span of human history, the nation is still a relatively new invention. Whether it is one worth fighting for remains to be seen.

Jerry Brotton is professor of Renaissance studies at Queen Mary University of London, and author of *A History of the World in Twelve Maps* (Allen Lane, 2012)

GETTY IMAGES

Experts explore the historical and contemporary challenges facing four parts of the world that have aimed for statehood

Catalonia

Where central government reining in regional autonomy sparked a push for independence

by ***Angel Smith***

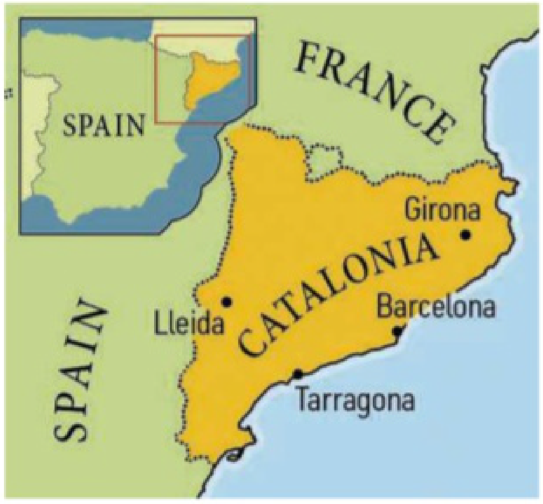
The Spanish political crisis provoked by Catalonia's ongoing push for independence has yet to be resolved – and has already had a massive impact on the country. It has led to the jailing of a number of pro-independence Catalan politicians, following the constitutionally illegal referendum on Catalan independence held in 2017. It has provoked a counter-mobilisation of Spanish nationalists, and is a key factor in the rise of the far-right-wing party Vox. And it is a major element in the instability of the Spanish political system. Spain's socialist prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, recently formed a minority coalition government, but will need the major Catalan nationalist party, the Republican Left of Catalonia, to back him – or at least abstain from voting – in order to get legislation through parliament. And that is by no means a given.

In Spain, as elsewhere in Europe, so-called 'small-nation nationalisms' – nationalist movements that seek either autonomy or independence for their own territory from the central state – have a long history. They tend to be based on identities that have their roots in the old European order prior to the French Revolution – in the Catalan case, the medieval Kingdom of Catalonia. Along with the Kingdoms of Aragon and Valencia, this formed the confederation known as the Crown of Aragon, a major European maritime power in the 12th and 13th centuries. Each of the component parts of this confederation had its own medieval parliament, and Catalonia and Valencia both used the Catalan language in their administrations.

Even after union with the Crown of Castile in 1479, these constitutions persisted and were swept away only at the beginning of the 18th century as a result of the new Spanish Bourbon monarch's 'right of conquest' following defeat for the Crowns of Aragon and Castile in the War of Spanish Succession.

Modern small-nation nationalisms, though, came to prominence as a result of the accumulation of perceived grievances and conflicts with the central Spanish state from the 19th century onward. In the first half of the 19th century, Catalan political and social elites bought into the project to construct a modern Spanish nation and, with the exception of its use in poetry, relegated the Catalan tongue to everyday life.

This stance changed in the second half of the century, in the context of a series of conflicts with the central state – over tariff protection, defence of Catalan civil law, marginalisation from political power and the heavy-handed use of the military in maintaining public



MAP ILLUSTRATION: PAUL HEWITT-BATTLEFIELD DESIGN

SOM REPÚBLICA
Llibertat!
PRESOS POLÍTICS
LLIBERTAT
PRESOS POLÍTICS!
LLIBERTAT
PRESOS POLÍTICS!

Street liberty
Protesters march through the streets of Barcelona during a rally in November 2017. Pro-independence sentiment in Catalonia has surged since 2010

order. This led to a growing belief that Catalonia – the most industrialised and prosperous part of Spain – was being stymied by governments that represented the economically backwards centre of Spain. It was in this context that a Catalan nationalist movement emerged at the end of the 1880s.

Refocusing on independence

Nevertheless, right through to the 20th century, the majority wing within this movement wanted political autonomy rather than outright independence. This was based on the fact that the collective adversary of early Catalan nationalism was perceived as 'the Castilians' (identified with central Spain), not Spaniards as a whole. Moreover, Catalan industry was dependent on the internal Spanish market, so independence would have led to an economic crisis. Indeed, between 1916 and 1918 the leader of the major Catalan nationalist party, Francesc Cambó, launched a failed bid to construct a 'Catalan Spain' – that is, a country that would decentralise its political system to accommodate Catalan demands, and industrialise along Catalan lines. In Cambó's view this would herald a new, harmonious relationship between Spain's nations and regions.

From the outset, Catalan nationalism aroused the extreme hostility of the Spanish right, with the result that under Spain's two 20th-century dictatorships – the Primo de Rivera and Franco regimes – the Catalan language and what were viewed as political manifestations of Catalan identity were suppressed. However, the Catalan nationalist movement was able to reach compromises with more liberal and left-wing Spanish-wide political forces, which proved willing to give Catalonia a measure of political autonomy. This was true of the Second Republic (1931–39) and of the post-Francoist democracy, which laid the basis for the establishment of a decentralised political system in the 1978 constitution. In Catalonia, pro-independence sentiment grew slowly from the 1990s, but the major shift took place from 2010 when increasing numbers mobilised in favour of independence. This then led Convergence and Union, the major political representative of Catalan nationalism, to shift its own position in 2012.

A number of factors were involved. One, certainly, was the rise of a new, more assertive generation of Catalan politicians. At the same time, there were growing complaints at high levels about fiscal transfer by the central state from Catalonia to Spain's poorer regions, and lack of investment in Catalan infrastructure. This hit home when the economic crisis exploded in 2008, resulting in big budget cuts. Furthermore, attempts to achieve greater autonomy were, to a large extent, stymied in 2010 when the Constitutional Court rejected several articles of a new Catalan autonomy statute.

There was also another overarching issue. When Spain joined the EEC (as it was then) in 1986, it had important implications. For Catalan nationalists, it conjured up the possibility of an independent Catalonia fully integrated into →

Catalan nationalism aroused the extreme hostility of the Spanish right under Primo de Rivera and Franco

GETTY IMAGES

the European market; the examples of prosperous small European nations such as the Netherlands, Belgium and Austria were attractive.

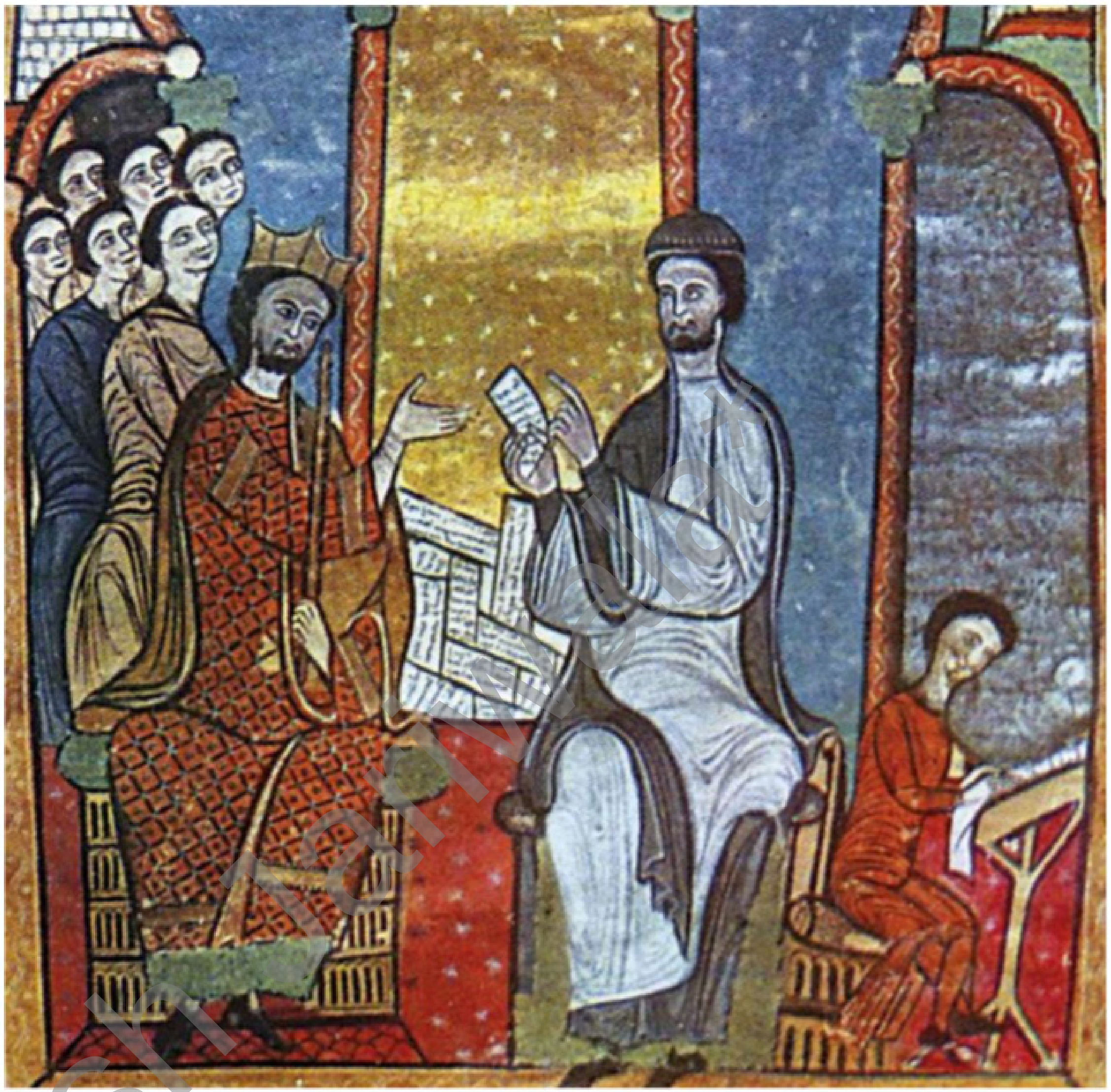
Scottish parallels

In this respect, there are parallels between Catalonia and Scotland. Both territories demand independence within the EU, and – not surprisingly – in both cases the Spanish and UK governments have countered that, if Scotland or Catalonia became independent, they would automatically find themselves excluded from the EU.

However, in future years they face rather different challenges. The Scottish National Party has the problem that, with the UK having left the EU, independence would presumably mean establishing a border between England and Scotland. However, it has advantages: British politicians have a more pluralistic view of the UK than their Spanish counterparts, and Scottish independence is not such an emotionally charged subject for most British people as Catalan independence is to the Spanish. In Spain, even if Pedro Sánchez wanted to give Catalans a referendum on independence, he would not be able to do so because of the backlash he would face.

Nevertheless, the fact that a leftist coalition is in power, and that it needs to woo the Republican Left of Catalonia, does offer scope for compromise. It will require, on the one hand, the government to offer a new autonomy statute and higher levels of public investment in Catalonia and, on the other, for the Republican Left to put independence on the back-burner. Both the Socialists and Republican Left would, as a result, face charges of betrayal – but the alternative is an ongoing conflict with no solution in sight. 🌐

Angel Smith is reader in modern Spanish history at the University of Leeds, and author of *The Origins of Catalan Nationalism, 1770–1898* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)



An illumination from the 12th-century *Liber feudorum major*. This important compendium of documents relating to the Crown of Aragon details the early institutional history of Catalonia

EL PRESIDENT DE CATALUNYA NO
D' ESQUERRA
LA LLIBERT

Left-wing Catalan nationalists march in Barcelona in 1936. Liberal governments had been willing to grant a degree of autonomy to the region – which was later suppressed by Franco's regime

GETTY IMAGES

*Naresh

Memorials to the fallen
A man digs graves in Sarajevo for victims of the war in Bosnia, 1992. Linguistic links between Balkan Slavic peoples weren't enough to paper over tensions in an ethnically diverse nation state

GETTY IMAGES

Yugoslavia

Why shared Slavic identity couldn't save an idealised nation from fracture and bloodshed

*by **John Connelly***

Modern nation states have grown out of the simple but revolutionary idea that they represent 'the people' better than the states from which they emerged – usually empires. However, once established, nation states also have to fend off challengers. They are stable only as long as they suppress rivals within their borders who claim to represent the people better than they do. The new nation states created a century ago in eastern Europe are prime examples of these patterns.

Yugoslavia is particularly instructive. It came together rapidly after the First World War as a constitutional Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. It quickly faced challenges because the peoples on this new state's territory had lived under different imperial regimes: Bosnians and most Serbs under the Ottomans, some Serbs and almost all Croats and Slovenes under the Habsburgs.

The idea that these diverse peoples should live in one state was initially just that: an idea. It formed in the minds of young eastern European intellectuals of the 1820s who had studied under German philosophers and believed that nations were communities united by culture and language.

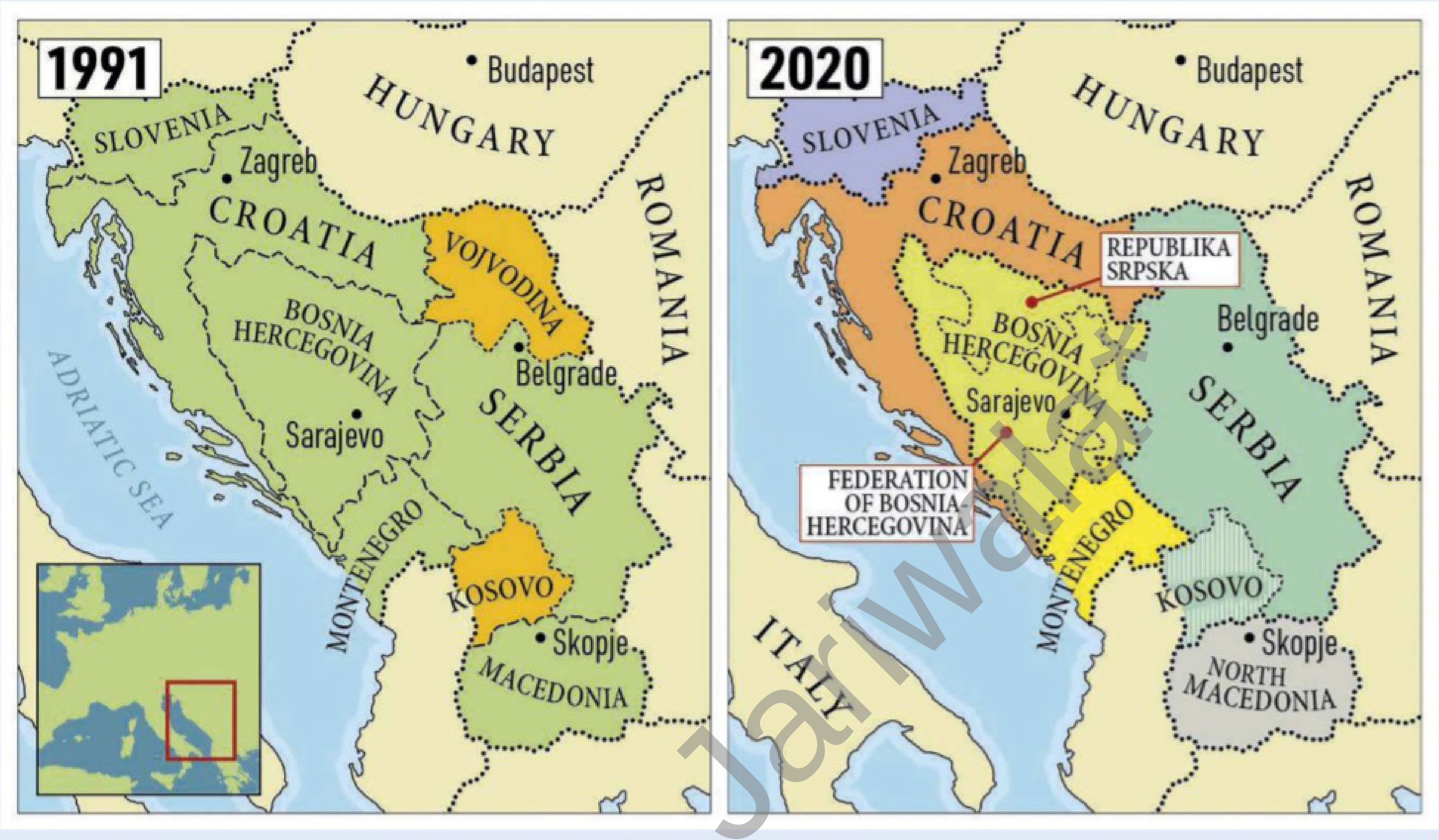
They knew that language connected the South Slavic peoples. In village after village along the Balkan peninsula, from Austria to the Black Sea, people understood each other. This suggested a common origin in Slavic tribes who had settled the peninsula in the sixth and seventh centuries. Philosophy posited that people speaking one tongue had a common spirit: thus these small South Slav peoples, speaking a language later designated Serbo-Croatian, seemed destined to form the Yugoslav nation.

The Yugoslav state that patriots had dreamed of came together so quickly because, after the Habsburg monarchy collapsed, Croat and Slovene politicians – fearing that Italy or Hungary might claim territories they considered their own – needed the Serb army to defend them. In late 1918, it was decided that their countries should join a Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, before Slovene or Croat peasants could be asked if they wanted to belong to this expanded state. There was not even time to negotiate a constitution that might have given these peoples limited autonomy.

Cracks appear

By the mid-1920s, it was clear something was amiss. A popular movement had formed among Croats, demanding full independence. Its leaders claimed that Serbs were corrupt and 'Turkified Orientals' who were exploiting Croatia for their own purposes, preferring to milk the 'more civilised' Croats than work hard themselves. If such complaints even registered among them, Serbs noted that Yugoslavia had been a Croat idea, and that it had been Croat leaders who had

→


1991
SLOVENIA
Zagreb
CROATIA
HUNGARY
Budapest
ROMANIA
VOJVODINA
BOSNIA HERCEGOVINA
Belgrade
SERBIA
Sarajevo
ADRIATIC SEA
MONTENEGRO
KOSOVO
Skopje
MACEDONIA
2020
SLOVENIA
Zagreb
CROATIA
HUNGARY
Budapest
ROMANIA
REPUBLIKA SRPSKA
Belgrade
BOSNIA HERCEGOVINA
Sarajevo
SERBIA
FEDERATION OF BOSNIA HERCEGOVINA
MONTENEGRO
KOSOVO
ITALY
Skopje
NORTH MACEDONIA

begged to form the state in 1918.

Nations are 'imagined communities', but more basically they are collectivities in which people tell each other a common story about who they are. By 1925, it was clear that the stories told by Serbs and Croats were very different. The Yugoslav state would be ruled centrally from Serb Belgrade for two generations, but it never fashioned a common set of stories to unite its peoples. What this state could do was use the police to suppress demands for independence.

That changed in the late 1980s when movements arose in Serbia, then Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia, following the script of the masses who ousted Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines. In newly opened political arenas, nationalist firebrands argued that peoples should rule themselves. No one had ever asked Croats or Slovenes if they wanted to belong to Yugoslavia, they said, and it was time to accord them this 'democratic' right.

Yugoslavia's dissolution, unlike that of Czechoslovakia to the north, was very violent because the borders of the republics did not divide the nationalities. When Croats voted for independence in spring 1991, the Serb areas of eastern Croatia declared themselves independent as a Serb republic. The following year, Croats and Muslims in Bosnia likewise chose independence, and Serb paramilitaries began seizing territory and killing and expelling non-Serb inhabitants in a republic that was a patchwork of nationalities. The phrase 'ethnic cleansing' entered common parlance.

The lesson the nationalists claimed both to invoke and teach was that a people's life was insecure unless it held a securely bounded nation state. Though supporting elections, they did not embody liberal democracy; rather, they used the available political space to inculcate fear. Spouted by ethnically controlled news outlets, extreme claims became 'facts' to which all politicians had to respond. Serbs were told that Muslims planned to create an ethnically clean Bosnia, raping their women, enslaving their children. By 1992, supporters of Yugoslav unity seemed to speak a language disconnected from basic realities, inaudible and unable to find adherents.

Among the South Slavs, stories of the national self thus formed over generations, and had little to do with the intentions of the original romantic patriots who imagined a harmonious Yugoslavia. Ultimately, ethnicity hardened into national identity in response to threats supposedly posed by other South Slavs, and the politicians who best represented

> **Ethnicity hardened into national identity in response to threats supposedly posed by other Slavs**

MAP ILLUSTRATION: PAUL HEWITT-BATTLEFIELD DESIGN/ GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

Women in traditional dress carry pictures of Stalin and Yugoslav leader Josep Broz Tito during a May Day parade. Yugoslavia was ruled from Belgrade and failed to build a sense of national unity

Stjepan Radić, leader of the Croatian Peasant Party, addresses supporters in 1928. By that point, Croats were pushing hard for autonomy, resenting perceived Serb hegemony in Yugoslavia

the people seemed to be those who claimed to be the only force that could save them from destruction.

What makes such a process difficult to understand and impossible to predict is how weak the supposed threats could be. The 'Muslim danger' was said to originate from tiny Kosovo, where Serbs were a minority but not under physical assault. (Kosovo had been part of Serbia in the Middle Ages, but over time its population had become majority Albanian.) Nevertheless, in 1986 the highest academic body in Belgrade claimed that Serbs in Kosovo faced "genocide". That was the message Serb dictator Slobodan Milošević used to build power in the late 1980s, based on mass rallies and the mobilisation of hundreds of thousands in his version of 'people power'.

EU solution

It's hard to imagine a scenario in which Yugoslavia might have survived, except perhaps one: if it had joined the EU before the rise of mass politics. Then it would have belonged to a large entity claiming to balance the interests of its regions while maintaining separate identities. Croats or Bosnian Muslims would have been like the Scots or Northern Irish in a UK before Brexit; belonging to the larger entity would have reduced the sense of being foreign within Yugoslavia (which was seen as Serb-dominated).

Perhaps Brexit has made eastern Europe more understandable in the UK. Now the Northern Irish and Scots might understand the feelings of Croats and Muslims living in Bosnia in 1992 – that suddenly they were in a much smaller union dominated by one historically aggressive and imperial people: for the Serbs, read the English. Brexit may thus take Britain closer to a European sensibility – unfortunately, a potentially very dangerous one. 🌐

John Connelly is professor of history at the University of California, Berkeley, and author of *From Peoples into Nations: A History of Eastern Europe* (Princeton, 2020)

→

Kurds in Iraq

An ancient people's hunt for a home in a war-torn region

by ***ĄĹİ ĠĶÂIĠĶÔŬĶ***

BRIDGEMAN

The Kurds are said to be the largest people never to have achieved statehood. However, the idea that the speakers of the many different Kurdish dialects – scattered across mountainous areas of eastern Anatolia, northern Iraq and western Iran, with smaller pockets in northern Syria, Armenia and north-eastern Iran – form a coherent 'people' is a relatively new one.

Kurdish is a language of the north-western Iranian group, and descent from people identified in the Bible as Medes, from what's now Iran, has been claimed. Early Mesopotamian records mention tribes with names that could be linked to 'Kurd', but modern Kurds may not have a single ancient ethnic heritage; certainly, the tribe has long been the primary level of identity and organisation.

The name 'Kurd' can definitively be traced to the period following the tribes' conversion to Islam in the seventh century AD. Even after that, they continued to exist largely in nomadic groups rather than occupying a defined homeland. Yet Kurds wielded significant military influence, peaking with Salah ad-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub (c1137–1193), known in the west as Saladin, the Kurdish warlord whose empire encompassed much of the Middle East and north-east Africa.

The vast area known historically as Kurdistan was never defined. Before the 20th century, Kurds lived mostly at the periphery of empires, in semi-autonomous tribal confederations in remote mountain valleys. And though the majority of Kurds are Sunni, significant minorities follow a variety of other religions. Tribal identities were paramount, and a northern Kurd from Diyarbakır would have struggled to understand a southern Kurd from Erbil, their tongues being distinctly different languages.

But in the upheaval during and after the First World War, this all began to change. Defeated by the Allies, the Ottoman empire was carved up into new states. The fate of the Kurds was an item on the agenda in the postwar discussions that continued for much of 1919 and which culminated in the foundation of the League of Nations in early 1920. A Committee of Kurdish Independence addressed the peace conference in Paris and, for a while, the notion of a Kurdish state was entertained. The peace treaty signed with Turkey at Sèvres in August 1920 contained an article stating that: "If within one year… the Kurdish peoples… shall address themselves to the Council of the League of Nations in such a manner as to show that a majority of the population… desires independence from Turkey, and if the Council then considers that these peoples are capable of such independence and recommends that it should be granted to them, Turkey hereby agrees to execute such a recommendation, and to renounce all rights and title over these areas."

Before such a scheme could be implemented, however, a resurgent Turkish nationalist movement led by the war hero Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) took charge of the defeated imperial army and, in a war of liberation, drove the occupation forces out of Anatolia. When the dust settled, the Allied powers agreed to revise the punitive Treaty of Sèvres. In the new peace treaty, signed at Lausanne in 1923, the article that promised Kurdish independence had vanished. Instead, the Kurds were incorporated into the new states of Turkey, Iraq and Syria, with a significant portion also dwelling in Iran.

Following the Second World War, the first embryo of a coherent Kurdish nationalist movement began to form

Arms and the men

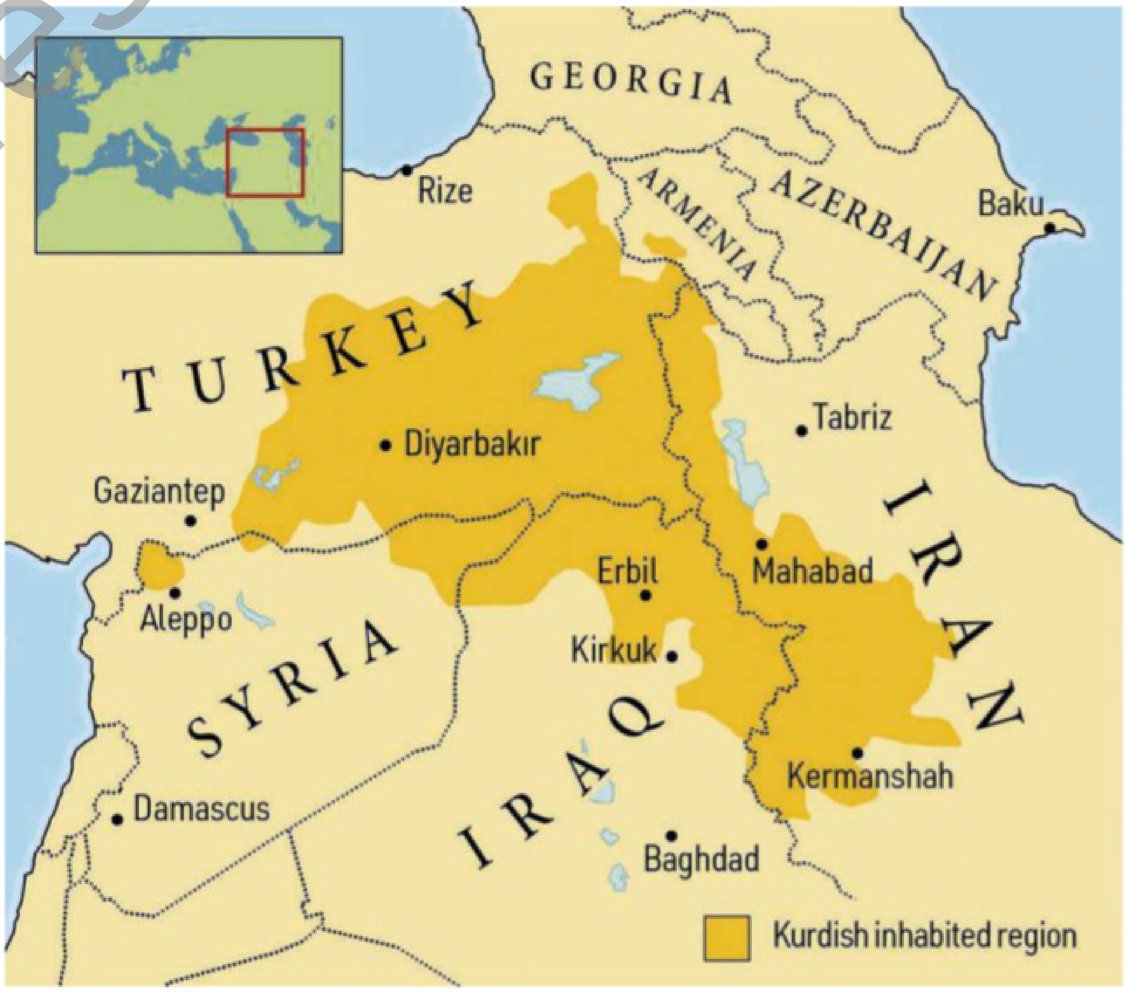
Kurdish fighters in north-west Iran, 1918. Some Kurdish nationalists worked with the British in the First World War, but the promised independence proposed in the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres failed to materialise

Naresh Jarmal

A strong Kurdish nationalist movement was slow to build and, though there were intermittent Kurdish protests during the British mandate over Iraq, these were largely local, tribal affairs. Yet with the modernity accompanying the new Iraqi state, a gradual 'national' consciousness began to grow. Through standardisation of the Kurdish language, which was taught in Kurdish schools in the north of Iraq, an incipient Kurdish literary culture took shape. Then, following the Second World War, the first embryo of a coherent Kurdish nationalist movement began to form.

Short-lived republic

Shortly after the war, a Soviet-sponsored Kurdish republic briefly came into existence in Mahabad, Iran. Its military commander was the indomitable Kurdish nationalist Mulla Mustafa Barzani, and the Barzani clan has dominated the Kurdish nationalist movement ever


GEORGIA
Rize
ARMENIA
AZERBAIJAN
Baku
TURKEY
Diyarbakır
Tabriz
Gaziantep
IRAN
Erbil
Mahabad
Aleppo
Kirkuk
SYRIA
IRAQ
Damascus
Kermanshah
Baghdad
Kurdish inhabited region

MAP ILLUSTRATION: PAUL HEWITT-BATTLEFIELD DESIGN

→

Iraqi Kurd émigrés celebrate the capture of Saddam Hussein by US forces in December 2003. Saddam had negotiated a deal with the Kurds in 1970, but brutally crushed later uprisings

since. The Mahabad republic was quickly defeated by Iran, and Barzani went into exile in the Soviet Union, where he remained until a revolution overthrew the British-installed Iraqi monarchy in July 1958. At that point, Barzani returned from exile to lead the Kurdistan Democratic Party, a disparate collection of leftist nationalists and more conservative tribal chieftains.

Assurances by the new military regime that Kurdish rights would be enshrined in a new constitution at first seemed to herald a new beginning for the Kurds. However, negotiations between Barzani and ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim, Iraq’s new prime minister, broke down. Barzani’s demands for autonomy were too far-reaching, and included making oil-rich Kirkuk the ‘capital’ of an autonomous Kurdistan. Eventually, the deadlock descended into all-out war between the government and the Kurds, who formed military units called Peshmerga to take on the Iraqi army.

Though Qasim’s regime was overthrown in 1963, subsequent military regimes followed a similar pattern: seeking negotiated settlement but eventually engaging in military action against the Kurds. Increasingly, the Shah of Iran and Israel provided financial and logistic support to the Kurdish rebels, in order to undermine the Iraqi government.

Deal with Saddam

When the Ba‘ath Party seized power in 1968, Saddam Hussein took charge of negotiations and successfully managed to agree a deal with Barzani in March 1970. Although the agreement was the most far-reaching ever signed by any Iraqi government – promising extensive autonomy with Kurdish-language provision, a guarantee of Kurdish officials in Kurdish areas, and a separate legislative body – it soon became clear that it was not enough for the Kurds.

War broke out again in 1974, this time on an unprecedented scale. By now, the Shah, along with the CIA, was providing millions of dollars to the Kurds annually, and extensive logistic support across the border. The Iranians even stationed troops disguised as Kurdish Peshmerga in Iraq to help the rebellion.

When the Shah unexpectedly made a deal with Saddam in March 1975, promising to withdraw support for the Kurds in exchange for Iraqi border concessions, Iraqi troops swiftly moved in and crushed the rebellion, forcing as many as 200,000 Kurds to flee to Iran. In the aftermath, the Kurds accused the government of pursuing an ‘Arabisation’ policy in the region. It therefore came as no big surprise that, when Iraq invaded Iran in 1980, the Kurds eventually sided with the Iranians, even though by then that latter country had become an Islamic republic following the overthrow of the Shah in 1978–79. The Kurds paid a heavy price for their decision, being branded traitors by the Saddam regime and taking the full brunt of a brutal campaign at the end of the war that saw thousands of Kurdish civilians killed as the Iraqi government retook areas captured by Iran and the Kurds.

Similar hardship afflicted the Kurds when, following Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait and defeat by the international coalition in early 1991, they rose up in rebellion anew, along with the Shia population in southern Iraq. The uprising was quickly crushed and, as the west looked on, millions of Kurds were uprooted from their homes. Many fled to Europe and beyond for safety. Eventually, their plight forced the international community to react. Belatedly, the United States and Britain established a no-fly zone in the north that effectively allowed the Kurds to develop a semi-autonomous proto-state under western protection. With the Saddam regime facing stiff international sanctions until

The Kurds discovered that Turkey and Iran were intent on preventing Kurdish independence at all costs

GETTY IMAGES

Naresh Jaiswal

being forcibly removed by the 2003 invasion, the Kurds continued to develop their own government institutions.

Following the war, the Kurdistan region was officially recognised in Iraq's new constitution, and a Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) led by Mulla Mustafa's son, Masoud, was set up. Yet, despite all vestiges of Saddam's regime being forcibly removed by an American 'de-Ba'athification' decree, the relationship between the Kurds and every post-invasion government, formed by Shia political parties, has continued to be troublesome. Outright war may have been avoided, but disagreement on sharing of oil proceeds continue to mar relations.

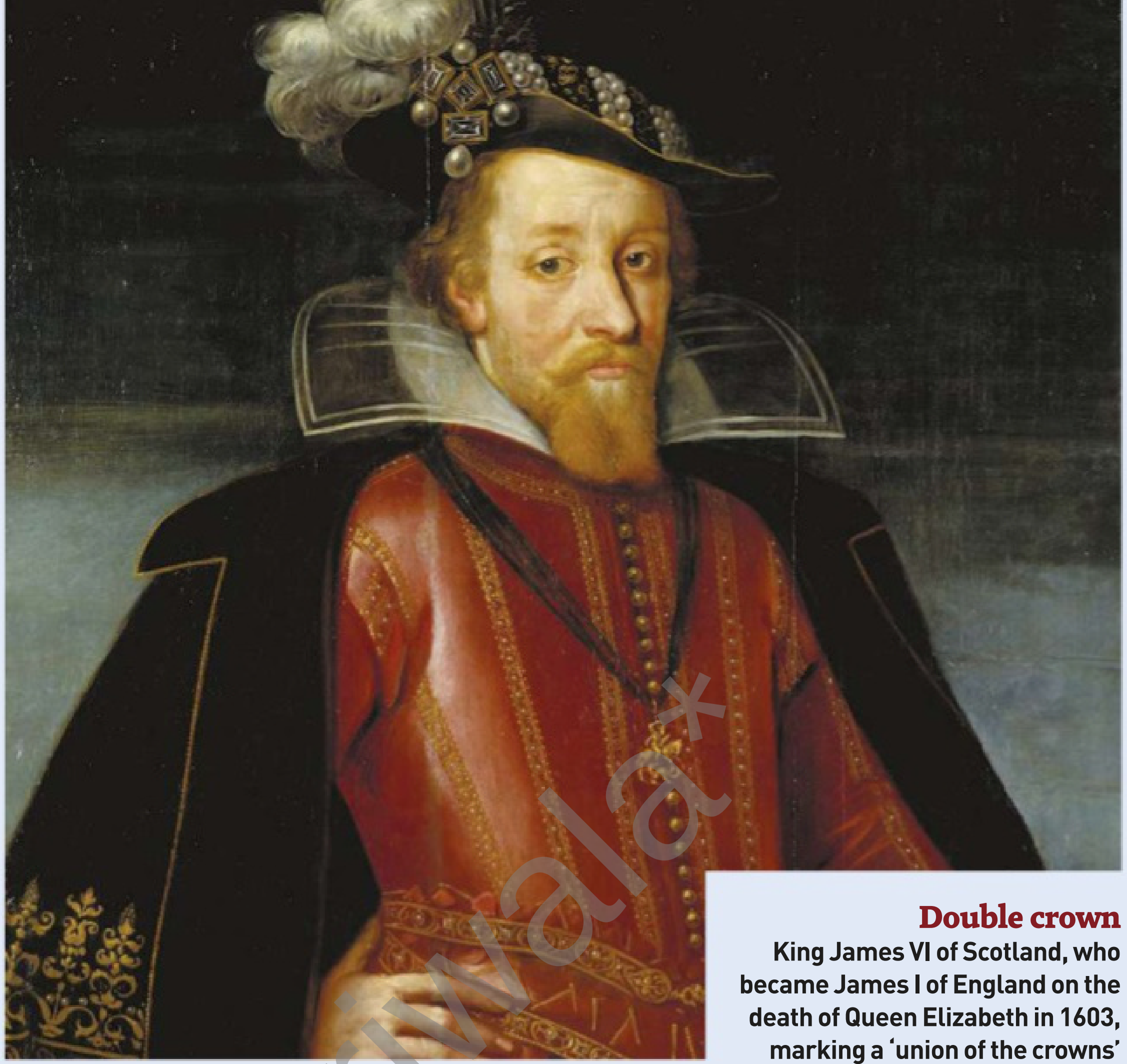
Votes for independence

The Kurdish leadership, dominated for over 70 years by the Barzanis (Masoud's nephew Nechirvan is now president), has continued to push for independence. In 2017, Masoud Barzani called for an independence referendum, and one was held in September the same year; some 93% voted for independence. The Iraqi government rejected the legality of the referendum, and tensions quickly led to armed confrontation in Kirkuk, during which government forces re-asserted authority and took back territory that had been captured by Kurdish Peshmerga in the fight against the so-called Islamic State over preceding years. Crucially, this included the Kirkuk oilfields.

The Kurds soon discovered that Turkey and Iran were intent on preventing Kurdish independence at all costs, and that even the United States, whom the Kurdish leadership thought of as an ally, would not intervene as the Iraqi government crushed Kurdish dreams of independence. Today, a century after the idea of a Kurdish state was first raised, Kurdish independence seems as distant a reality as ever.

Johan Franzén is senior lecturer in Middle East history at the University of East Anglia

GETTY IMAGES/MAP ILLUSTRATION: PAUL HEWITT-BATTLEFIELD DESIGN



Double crown
King James VI of Scotland, who became James I of England on the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603, marking a 'union of the crowns'

Scotland

How the strains of Brexit threaten a centuries-old union

by David Reynolds

The United Kingdom has never been a single nation: no one ever speaks of being a 'Ukanian'. The UK is a messy conglomerate formed out of the expansionary appetite of successive English monarchs and the resistance put up by their neighbours. Although Wales had succumbed by the 1530s, formal union was the result of a situation in which England could not suppress Scotland or Ireland, yet they in turn could not keep it at bay. The catalyst in both cases was England's perennial warfare with France.

Aberdeen
Oban
SCOTLAND
Edinburgh
N. IRELAND

After the end of Roman rule in the fifth century, the island of Britain fragmented into a number of feuding realms. Traditionally, the Scots and the Picts are said to have been fused into the kingdom of Scotland in 843, under pressure from Viking invasions. But maintaining independence was no easy task. Norse control of Shetland and Orkney lasted into the 15th century, and Scottish monarchs had to fight a series of brutal wars against England for some 250 years from 1296, during which warlords such as William Wallace and Robert Bruce became national icons. Against the odds, Scotland secured its

→

independence and also deepened its distinctive identity, being ruled since 1371 by the House of Stuart.

In 1603, when Queen Elizabeth died childless, James VI of Scotland also became James I of England. By now, both countries had embraced the Protestant Reformation and on either side of the border there was a feeling that 'if you can't beat them, join them'. By the 1700s, though, this union of the crowns seemed insufficient to Queen Anne and her ministers. The Scottish parliament was reluctant to approve taxes and troops for England's war against Louis XIV; nor would it endorse the succession of Sophia of Hanover if Anne died childless, in order to ensure that the Anglo-Scottish kingdoms remained Protestant. So the English applied pressure, and the Scots agreed to a treaty of union, which came into force in 1707.

GETTY IMAGES

Dirty deal?

To Scottish nationalists, the Act of Union remains a dirty deal. Yet Scotland's legal and religious institutions remained untouched, and union also brought real advantages for Scottish commerce by creating a common market. English capital could flow across the border, Scottish traders were guaranteed access to England's lucrative American colonies, and Glasgow merchants quickly secured dominance in the transatlantic tobacco trade.

Through this legislative union, Scotland's people and resources were harnessed to England's imperial project. Colonial administration and the army depended heavily on Scottish manpower. Historian Robert Colls has aptly declared that "England made the Union, but Scotland made it work".

Union with Ireland in 1801 was prompted by Britain's war with revolutionary France, which attempted two invasions of Ireland to support Irish rebels. Unlike the Scots, the Irish struggled to hold their own in the British empire. Scotland's precocious industrialisation allowed it to exploit English capital and commerce within the common market, whereas union only accentuated the colonial status of Ireland's heavily agrarian society. For many Irish people, emigration seemed the only answer, and the Gaelic revival fostered nationalist sentiment among those who remained.

In 1912 the Liberal government, dependent on Irish MPs for its Commons majority, introduced a Home Rule bill for Ireland. Activists in Scotland proposed their own Home Rule bill, which passed its second reading in the Commons in 1913. In Wales, anti-English passions were directed against the established Anglican Church, whose wealth buttressed the power of largely English landlords.

Then, out of the blue, came the assassination in Sarajevo in June 1914 that triggered the First World War. The Liberal government still forced Irish Home Rule onto the statute book, together with disestablishment of the Anglican Church in Wales. But implementation of both pieces of legislation was suspended for the duration of the war, while the Scottish Home Rule bill failed to get a third reading because of the pressure of wartime business.

The First World War proved a turning point for the UK. Four years of Scottish and Welsh sacrifice for the British empire had a lasting effect. Although new nationalist parties were founded in both countries during the 1920s, neither made much headway, and the new sense of Britishness in Scotland and Wales, sealed in blood, was reinforced by another world war.

While the First World War forged Britain anew, it split Ireland asunder. Irish nationalists secured independence through a bitter guerrilla war in 1919–21. But six counties in the north-east of Ireland remained within the UK, partitioned off by the British

Scottish sacrifice

Scottish soldiers during the First World War. "Four years of Scottish sacrifice for the British empire in 1914–18 had a lasting effect," says David Reynolds

In the 1990s, the UK's ad hoc 'First World War settlement' – a cohesive Britain and a divided Ireland – finally began to unravel

into a Protestant-dominated rump state. Until the 1960s, London turned a blind eye to discrimination against Catholics but then, amid mounting paramilitary violence on both sides, it imposed direct rule from Westminster and introduced British troops. Still the bloodshed continued: some 3,500 people died during three decades of 'the Troubles'.

In the 1990s, what we might call the UK's ad hoc 'First World War settlement' – a cohesive Britain and a divided Ireland – finally began to unravel. By then, decolonisation had dissolved the cement of the British empire, and the Scottish and Welsh economies – built on coal, steel and other 'nationalised' heavy industries – had also become uncompetitive. The Thatcher government's aggressive programme of privatisation hit especially hard in Scotland, where around one-third of the employed population still worked for central or local governmental organisations and businesses. So when Tony Blair's Labour government offered referenda on devolution in 1997, Scotland and (less decisively) Wales voted in favour. In 1999, devolved governments were inaugurated in Edinburgh and Cardiff.

By this time, both sides in Northern Ireland had wearied of the Troubles. Intense efforts by London and Dublin culminated in the 'Good Friday Agreement' of 1998. London pulled British troops off the streets of the province and agreed to restore devolved government in Belfast. Northern Ireland also became much more open to the Irish Republic, notably by dismantling the militarised border but also in less visible ways, such as the creation of a single electricity market across the whole of Ireland.

Route to a referendum

What could be termed the 'Millennium Settlement' of 1998–99 developed a momentum of its own, particularly in Edinburgh where the Scottish National Party (SNP) – which formed a majority government from 2011 – manoeuvred its way to holding a referendum on independence in 2014. Although the vote was much closer than London had expected, a clear majority (55% to 45%) voted for Scotland to stay within the union. That seemed to settle the issue for a generation.

But the 2016 EU referendum has thrown all that into confusion. Although Wales, like England, voted to leave the EU, 62% of voters in Scotland and 56% in Northern Ireland wanted to remain. That cut no ice with the Conservative government in London. In June 2019, a YouGov poll of Conservative party members indicated that 63% were ready to bid farewell to Scotland, and 59% to Northern Ireland, in order to have the pleasure of waving goodbye to Brussels.

The most sensitive part of the UK is Scotland. First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has said she wants a second referendum on independence in 2020 because Brexit has changed the whole political landscape. But she has also stated that this must, as in 2014, be held with the agreement of the UK government under the Scotland Act of 1998. UK prime minister Boris Johnson has said a flat "no", and Sturgeon is under pressure from SNP activists to ignore London, raising the spectre of a unilateral declaration of independence by Edinburgh.

Even if Johnson did allow another referendum, the challenges for Scotland would be enormous. If it voted to leave the UK, what currency would it use? The SNP wants to keep the pound sterling for the moment, but would London agree? In any case, any Scottish declaration of independence would rupture Britain's 300-year old 'common market'. How would the new border be policed?

Given such challenges, perhaps Sturgeon would back away from independence if offered a new, much more radical devolution package. Certainly a looser union, de facto or de jure – stripped of what has been called "central imperial condescension" – is essential if the UK is still going to hang together.

David Reynolds is emeritus professor of international history at the University of Cambridge. His latest book is *Island Stories: Britain and its History in the Age of Brexit* (William Collins, 2019)

SUBSCRIBE **TODAY**

INTRODUCTORY OFFER

Start a 14-day trial and enjoy a FREE issue today!

BBC World Histories is the new bi-monthly title from the *BBC History Magazine* team, offering accessible and in-depth features exploring a wide range of topics from our global past

GET IT ON Google play

zinio™

amazon apps Available on kindle fire

Nareshdariwala

World Histories
China vs the
AZTECS
in their own words
Discover the human stories behind the bloody myths
A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MENOPAUSE
WILL THE UK SPLIT? A HISTORIAN'S VIEW
MARY BEARD ON THE SHOCK OF THE NUDE
What can Nato learn from ancient Athens?
The alliance that fuelled the Cold War

Have *BBC World Histories* delivered straight to your tablet

Save when you subscribe

BBC World Histories

A respected tavernkeeper who served thirsty locals for decades. A hardworking dockhand. A skilled hunter, teacher and writer. All of these diverse characters had one thing in common: they were known as ‘female husbands’

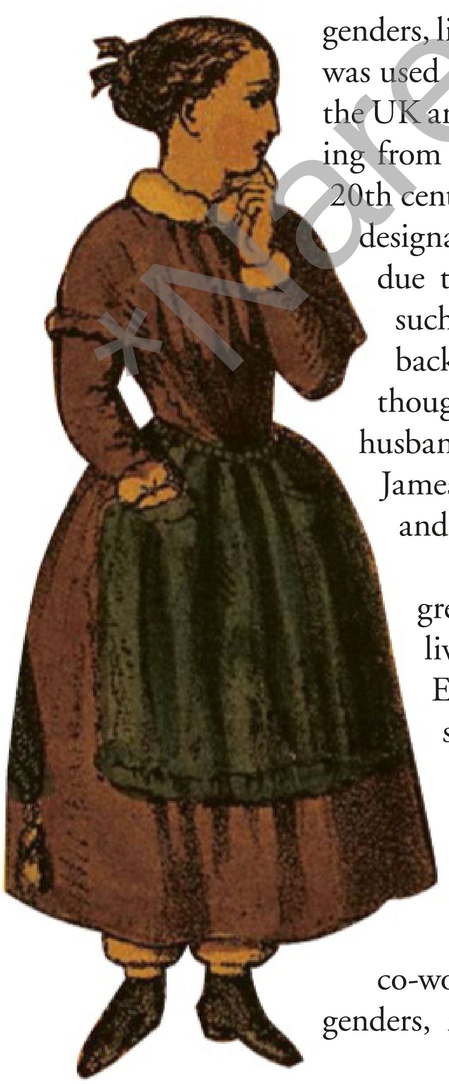
By Jen Manion

The transgender rights movement has achieved widespread visibility and recognition in the past decade. For some people, this issue seems very new and modern – a 21st-century development. They reminisce of earlier times, perhaps their own childhoods, when most people accepted the distinct expectations and opportunities outlined for boys and girls. In hindsight, the movements for women's rights or gay and lesbian equality seem modest in their critique of gender: none demanded the eradication of the distinction between men and women in public spaces, an ability to change one's sex legally or medically, or a shift away from gendered language towards gender-neutral terms such as 'they'.

From this perspective, the demands of the transgender rights movement seem novel, as if the emergence of the community itself was triggered by the dawn of a new century and little else. But exploring the history of 'transing' gender shows us that nothing could be further from the truth. While the transgender community in recent years has somewhat coalesced around a certain set of experiences, concerns and language, an exploration of historical instances of transing reveals that people took a wide range of paths in challenging gender.

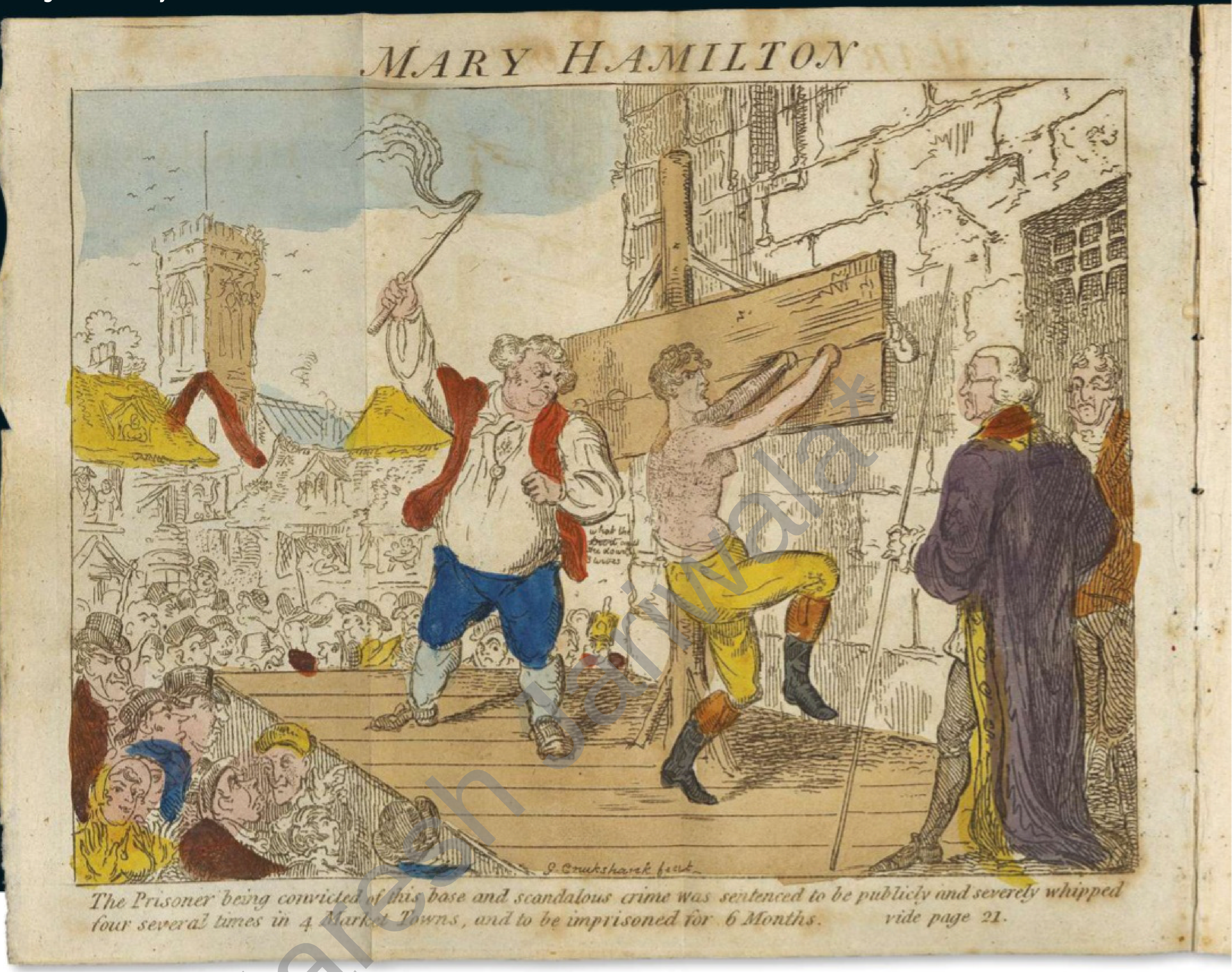
One particular branch that caught my eye as I began researching this topic many years ago was a group of people called 'female husbands'. This term was used to describe someone who was assigned female at birth, transed genders, lived as a man and married a woman. The phrase was used first in the UK in 1746, circulating throughout the UK and the US during the 19th century, then fading from prominent usage in the early years of the 20th century. The turn of the 21st century has been designated the 'transgender tipping point', in part due to highly visible trans women celebrities such as Laverne Cox and Caitlyn Jenner. Turn back the clock to the 18th and 19th centuries, though, and we find an era that belonged to female husbands such as Charles Hamilton, James Howe, James Allen and Joseph Lobdell. But who were they – and why should we care?

Hamilton, Howe, Allen and Lobdell each grew up poor and learned to scrape together a living to support themself, even in their youth. Each found love at least once in their life. For some, it was fleeting, as unsuspecting lovers rejected them for their difference. For others, the spark of love led to marriages lasting 20 years or more. Most of them were known only as men, the origins of their assigned sex undetected by neighbours and co-workers for decades. Some embraced nonbinary genders, moving between expressions of manhood and



WELLCOME LIBRARY

→


MARY HAMILTON
G. Cruikshank fecit
The Prisoner being convicted of this base and scandalous crime was sentenced to be publicly and severely whipped four several times in 4 Market Towns, and to be imprisoned for 6 Months. vide page 21.

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY DIGITAL COLLECTIONS

womanhood as required by desire or circumstance. All were described as 'female husbands' by reporters and publishers seeking to attract readers with enticing and original stories.

In the writing of their lives, I decided to embrace the newly popular and increasingly accepted pronoun singular 'they' when referring to husbands in the third person. This was a difficult decision, inspired by dozens of conversations with students and colleagues about the merits and pitfalls. 'They' seemed the perfect way to honour these extraordinary lives that never fit neatly into the box of 'man' or 'woman', and will make the past legible and relatable to contemporary transgender and nonbinary readers – a group that has long been denied a history of their own.

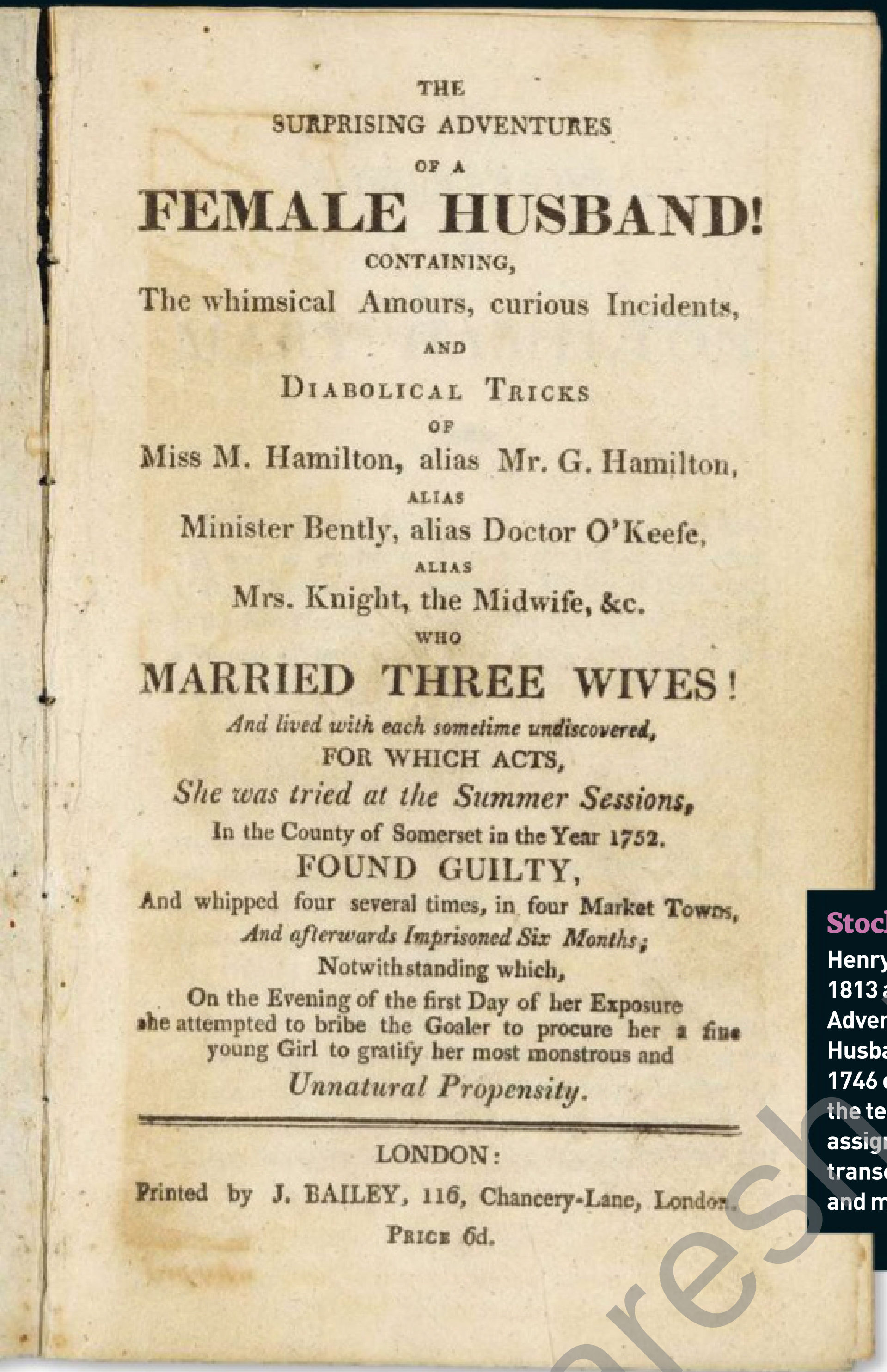
English playwright and novelist Henry Fielding first popularised the phrase 'female husband' in reference to someone assigned female who lived as a man and married a woman. His fictionalised essay 'The Female Husband' (1746) was based on the real case of the charismatic mountebank Charles Hamilton and their bride, Mary Price.

We can only speculate as to what drew the pair together in the first place. Charles was affable, charming and outgoing, living a life mostly on the road. Mary proved herself to be confident, strong and assertive. She was probably bored living with her aunt, who rented rooms for extra income – which is how the travelling quack doctor came into her life in the first place.

But the excitement and anticipation of young love was short-lived. After about two months of marriage in 1746, Mary decided that she did not want to be with Charles. It may have been that she realised for the first time that her husband was no ordinary man; at least, that is what she told authorities.

We know this from records drawn up in Glastonbury, about six miles from Mary's home in Wells. The court there charged Charles with vagrancy, a category of crime that was vague and flexible, and often used in cases in which the transgression was highly subjective, concerning morals and norms. The judge found Charles guilty of fraud and declared them "an uncommon, notorious cheat". They were sentenced to six months of hard labour in prison and public whipping in the four different towns

Wives of female husbands were often viewed as 'normal' or 'straight' victims of circumstance

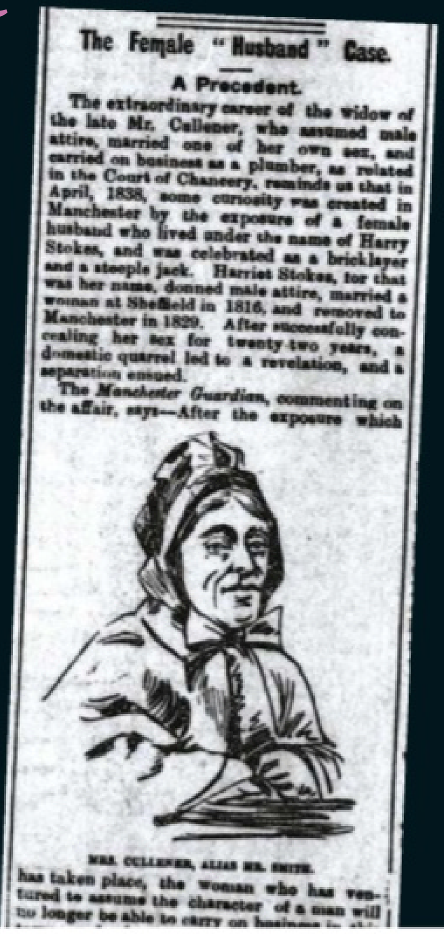


THE
SURPRISING ADVENTURES
OF A
FEMALE HUSBAND!
CONTAINING,
The whimsical Amours, curious Incidents,
AND
DIABOLICAL TRICKS
OF
Miss M. Hamilton, alias Mr. G. Hamilton,
ALIAS
Minister Bently, alias Doctor O'Keefe,
ALIAS
Mrs. Knight, the Midwife, &c.
WHO
MARRIED THREE WIVES!
And lived with each sometime undiscovered,
FOR WHICH ACTS,
She was tried at the Summer Sessions,
In the County of Somerset in the Year 1752.
FOUND GUILTY,
And whipped four several times, in four Market Towns,
And afterwards Imprisoned Six Months;
Notwithstanding which,
On the Evening of the first Day of her Exposure
she attempted to bribe the Goaler to procure her a fine
young Girl to gratify her most monstrous and
Unnatural Propensity.

LONDON:
Printed by J. BAILEY, 116, Chancery-Lane, London.
PRICE 6d.

Stock response

Henry Fielding's fictionalised 1813 account of 'The Surprising Adventures of a Female Husband', a reissue of the 1746 original which introduced the term used for a person assigned female at birth, who transed gender, lived as a man and married a woman



The Female "Husband" Case.

A Precedent.

The extraordinary career of the widow of the late Mr. Callener, who assumed male attire, married one of her own sex, and carried on business as a plumber, as related in the Court of Chancery, reminds us that in April, 1838, some curiosity was created in Manchester by the exposure of a female husband who lived under the name of Harry Stokes, and was celebrated as a bricklayer and a steeple jack. Harriet Stokes, for that was her name, donned male attire, married a woman at Sheffield in 1816, and removed to Manchester in 1829. After successfully concealing her sex for twenty-two years, a domestic quarrel led to a revelation, and a separation ensued.

The *Manchester Guardian*, commenting on the affair, says—After the exposure which

MRS. CULLENER, ALIAS MR. SMITH.

has taken place, the woman who has ventured to assume the character of a man will no longer be able to carry on business in

Media fascination

An 1893 *Dublin Evening Telegraph* report tells the story of Harry Stokes, born Harriet, who lived as a married man for 20 years

Naresh Sriwal

in which Charles was known to have lived: Taunton, Glastonbury, Wells and Shepton Mallet. The punishment was quite severe, especially because the court struggled to even determine which law Charles had actually violated. But the ruling sent a strong message: transing gender and marrying a woman would be met with swift and severe punishment.

Denying difference

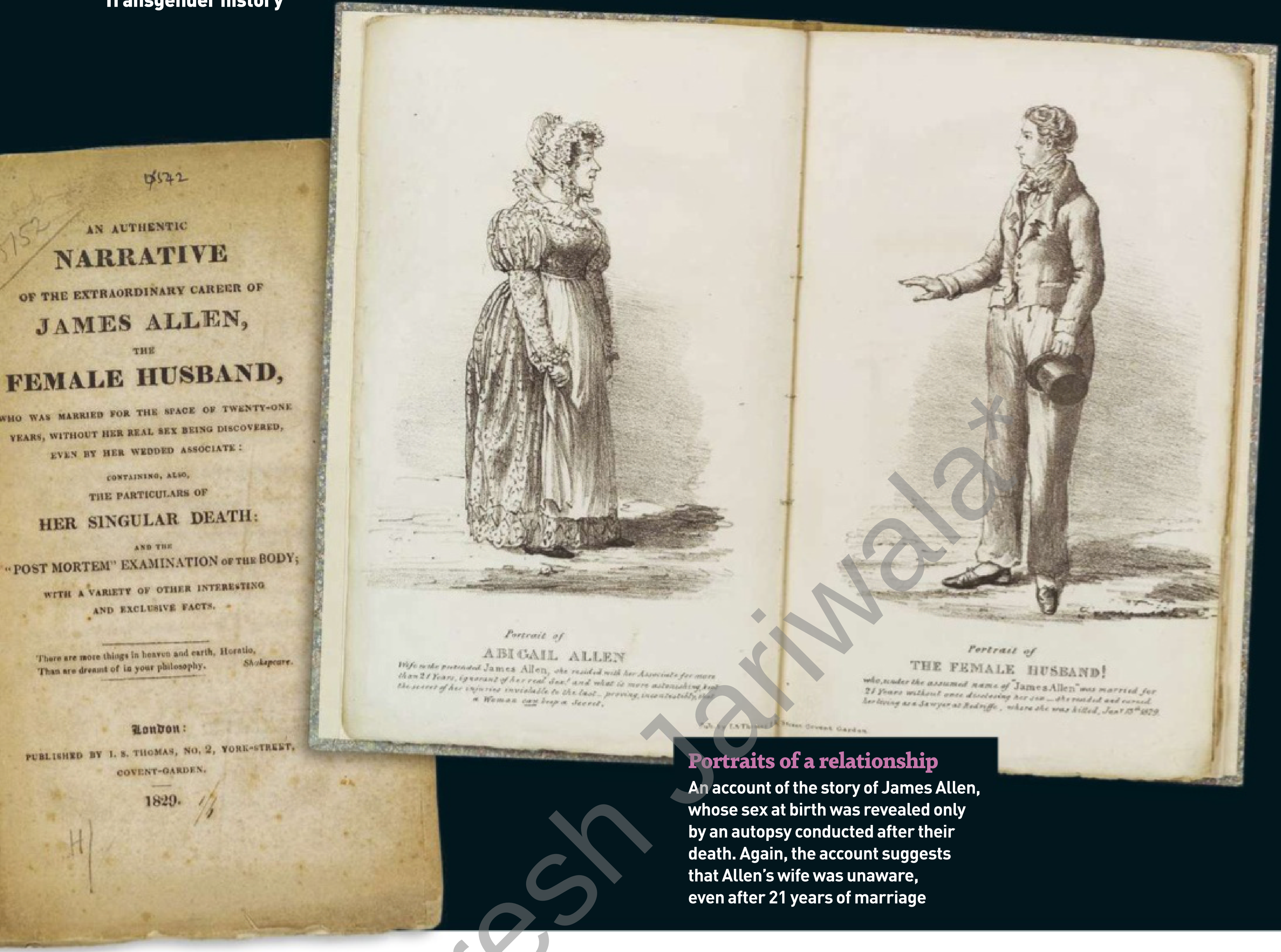
News of such punishments, however, did not deter others from transing gender. James Howe ran the White Horse Tavern in the Poplar district of London's East End with their wife, Mary, for more than 20 years from around 1740. Both James and Mary had grown up poor, and were put out to work by their families as teenagers. They worked on their feet at physically demanding labour every day at the bar – and, probably, most days of their lives. Only by grit, sacrifice, collaboration, consistency and some luck did they manage to build a successful business. They worked, paid taxes, went to church, donated to the needy, and saved some money for the unpredictable future. Life was good – far better than either expected, given the hardship and turmoil that marked their early years. James and Mary found love, companionship and security in each other, working side by side for their more than 30 years of marriage.

Mary had known James as a child, when the latter had lived in society as a girl. Together, in 1732 they decided that James would trans gender and live as a man so that they could marry and live together as a married couple. Mary knew exactly what she was getting into. Who knows – maybe it was even her idea? So much is said about those who visibly reject gender norms and live as men; so little is said and known about the women who love them, live with them, and in many ways enable their gender to be socially legible.

Mary's name is not mentioned in the popular magazine and newspaper articles that circulated about the couple for more than a century, from 1766 into the 1880s. While the female husbands were deemed so remarkable as to merit a new category to describe them, their wives were offered no such importance. Rather, they were often viewed as 'normal' or 'straight' women who were victims of circumstance or got swept away and deceived by one particular man. But there is no denying their

→

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY DIGITAL COLLS./NEWSPAPER IMAGE © BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. THANKS TO BRITISH NEWSPAPER ARCHIVE



AN AUTHENTIC
NARRATIVE
OF THE EXTRAORDINARY CAREER OF
JAMES ALLEN,
THE
FEMALE HUSBAND,
WHO WAS MARRIED FOR THE SPACE OF TWENTY-ONE
YEARS, WITHOUT HER REAL SEX BEING DISCOVERED,
EVEN BY HER WEDDED ASSOCIATE:
CONTAINING, ALSO,
THE PARTICULARS OF
HER SINGULAR DEATH:
AND THE
"POST MORTEM" EXAMINATION OF THE BODY;
WITH A VARIETY OF OTHER INTERESTING
AND EXCLUSIVE FACTS.

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy. *Shakspeare.*

London:
PUBLISHED BY I. S. THOMAS, NO. 2, YORK-STREET,
COVENT-GARDEN.
1829.

Portrait of
ABIGAIL ALLEN
Wife to the pretended James Allen, she resided with her Associate for more than 21 Years, ignorant of her real Sex! and what is more astonishing kept the secret of her injuries inviolable to the last_ proving, incontestably, that a Woman can keep a Secret.

Portrait of
THE FEMALE HUSBAND!
who, under the assumed name of "James Allen" was married for 21 Years without once disclosing her sex _ she resided and earned her living as a Sawyer at Redriffe, where she was killed, Jan^y 13th 1829.

Portraits of a relationship
An account of the story of James Allen, whose sex at birth was revealed only by an autopsy conducted after their death. Again, the account suggests that Allen's wife was unaware, even after 21 years of marriage

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY DIGITAL COLLECTIONS

queerness – especially for someone like Mary who chose to marry a female husband.

And yet sometimes circumstances required female wives to do just that: deny their difference and claim that they didn't even know that their husbands weren't male. In 1829, James Allen lay dead on a table at St Thomas Hospital, as the senior medical student, John Martin, undertook an autopsy. Martin declared Allen dead upon arrival, and determined the cause of death as blunt trauma to the head, reporting, "the whole of the bones of the skull were fractured". Unexpectedly for all involved, Martin had more to report, declaring: "the dead is a woman".

Though Martin reported his news rather matter-of-factly, the room was filled with those who knew James Allen to be a man: co-workers, boss, neighbours. Even the coroner, Thomas Shelton, had to reckon with the conflict: the marriage certificate declared James a legally married man, whereas Martin had created a medical document that designated them a woman.

Shelton was a lawyer, not a medical man. His work as coroner was about making sure that cause of death was properly designated, and holding appropriate parties accountable in the event of murder, negligence or other wrongful death. In this case, Shelton believed that a marriage certificate carried more weight than a medical report. He declared: "I considered it impossible for him to be a woman, as he had a wife." While others were flabbergasted at the development, and reporters began using feminine pronouns in reference to Allen, Shelton stood fast in his view of Allen's manhood.

Gender and danger

For those assigned female at birth, living as a man was never without risk; for some, it was filled with hardship and danger. Such was the case for Joseph Lobdell, a hardworking and resourceful person who grew up in Westerlo, New York state, outside Albany. Lobdell had considerable responsibility in their family from a young age, working on the farm, tending the animals and hunting game in the surrounding woods.

As someone who was perceived as a young woman, Lobdell was celebrated for their devotion and many talents, including a knack for hunting, farming, reading, writing and teaching. In Lobdell's 1855 memoir of these early years, *The Female Hunter of Delaware and Sullivan Counties, NY*, they complain of the

For those assigned female at birth, living as a man was never without risk; for some, it was filled with hardship

Social challenges
Joseph Lobdell, named Lucy at birth in 1829, was celebrated as a hunter, farmer, writer and teacher – but was faced with cruelty from their birth family as well as other social and legal challenges after deciding to live fully as a man

WAYNE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY PENNSYLVANIA/BAMBI LOBDELL

hardship of supporting a family on the wages available to women. They were confident that they could do any work that a man did, and set off to do so – now presenting fully as male.

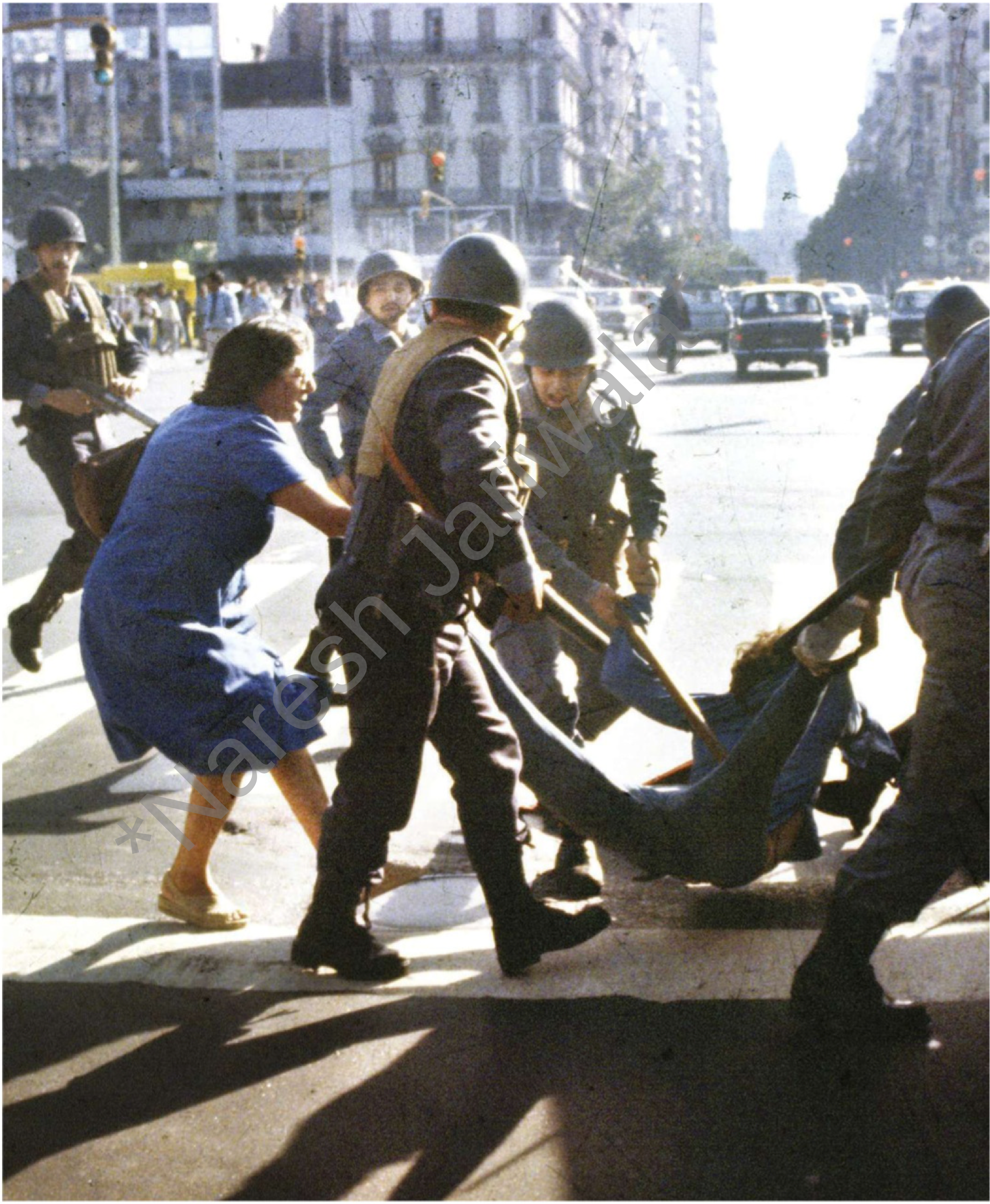
This decision marked a new course in their life – one that was filled with many new experiences, feelings of visibility and recognition in their manhood, and many feelings of erasure and hurt in the face of hostility. Indeed, across the course of decades, Lobdell would have their gender challenged repeatedly in the court of law, the court of public opinion and, finally, at the behest of their birth family, who had them declared insane and institutionalised on account of their gender in 1879. Their wife of nearly 20 years, Marie Louise Perry, was even misled into believing that Joseph had died; Joseph's brother, James, circulated a false newspaper obituary, and it took Marie nearly a year to discover the truth. Such was the cruelty with which family members and mental-health officials often treated those who transed gender in the late-19th-century United States.

We know about female husbands and their wives only because newspapers in both the UK and the US took great interest in printing stories about them. Female husbands usually became known to local media in times of crisis or duress, often arrest or death. The stories focus on tragedy and hardship. Some of them, especially the accounts about Lobdell, are heartbreaking.

Charles Hamilton, James Howe, James Allen and Joseph Lobdell are just four people who earned the label 'female husband' in the press in the 18th and 19th centuries. Assigned female at birth, they transed gender to live as men and marry women, long before the term 'transgender' was coined or the development of treatments and surgeries that enabled people to physically change their sex.

Their partners – long overlooked by writers, readers, and historians alike – were crucial to their happiness and social respectability. In countless ways, these legal marriages to queer wives affirmed and stabilised the gender of female husbands. Together, these couples carved out lives for themselves that were never easy, filled with uncertainty and risk – but, for most of the pairs, they couldn't imagine an alternative.

Jen Manion is associate professor of history at Amherst College, Massachusetts. Their new book is *Female Husbands: A Trans History* (Cambridge University Press, March 2020)



GETTY IMAGES

Disappearing in full view

A woman desperately tries to prevent the arrest of a man by the Argentine army in March 1982. The military junta, by then led by General Leopoldo Galtieri, had embarked in 1976 on a so-called 'dirty war' against left-wing and liberal critics of the regime, aided by the vicious Argentine Anticommunist Alliance who kidnapped, tortured and murdered thousands of dissenters. An estimated 30,000 people were killed or forcibly 'disappeared' during the seven years of military rule, and thousands more were incarcerated in the 340 concentration camps set up to hold the detainees.

A YEAR IN PICTURES

1982

Oppression and opposition, coups and crashes

An era of political and economic upheaval came to be defined by images of military persecution in Latin America, refugees in Asia and dissent in Europe. **Richard Overy** reviews a turbulent year →

Sea change

Refugees from Vietnam attempt to cross the South China Sea in a small vessel in 1982 – a handful of the more than 800,000 'boat people' who fled the country following victory for the communist north in the bloody Vietnam War that ended in 1975, and from Cambodia and Laos after communist regimes took power in those states in the same year. The occupants of this boat were lucky, being picked up by a vessel of the humanitarian organisation Médecins du Monde, founded in 1980 in reaction to this crisis. Thousands of refugees fell victim to Thai pirates, who seized possessions, raped women and murdered those who resisted. Others died from lack of food and water, or drowned in stormy weather. Those who were rescued were housed in temporary camps before being resettled in western states, mostly following the launch of a United Nations programme in 1979.

Workers unite

A group of demonstrators protests in Gdańsk, Poland on May Day 1982, in defiance of the declaration of martial law by head of state General Wojciech Jaruzelski the previous December. They hold banners sporting the name *Solidarność* (Solidarity), the trade union founded in Gdańsk two years earlier and led by Lech Wałęsa. By 1981, *Solidarność* had ten million members and, though banned by Jaruzelski, became the foremost organisation pushing for wider workers' rights, social change and political liberalisation, playing a crucial role in the return of Polish democracy in 1989.

SOLIDARNOŚĆ
SOLIDARNOŚĆ

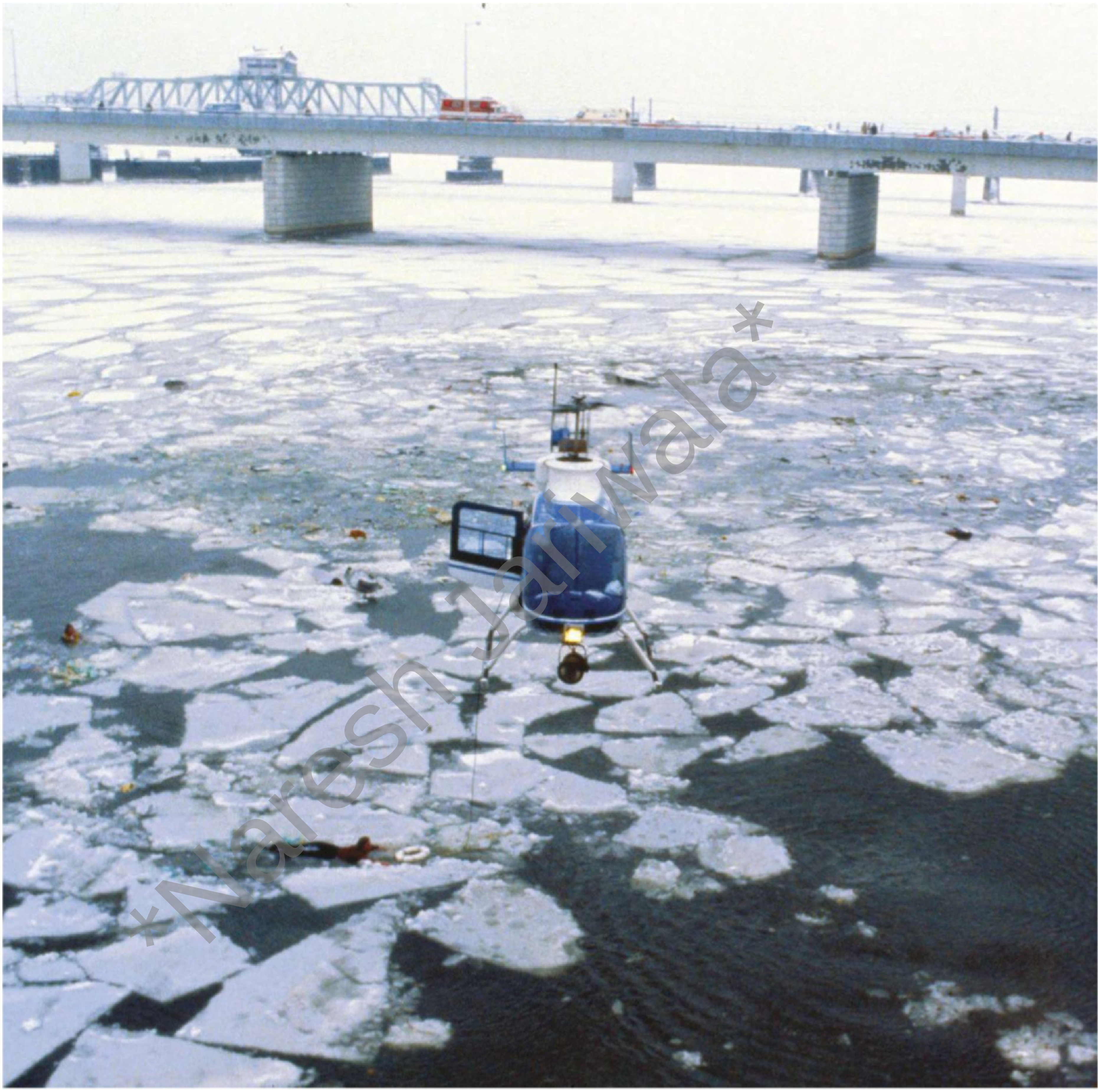
GETTY IMAGES/ALAMY

Beirut at war

A Palestinian fighter overlooks the Luna Park amusement complex in Beirut during the First Lebanon War in summer 1982. The war had begun on 6 June when Israeli forces invaded southern Lebanon to attack the Palestine Liberation Organization and other anti-Israeli militia occupying the area. The PLO was forced to abandon Lebanon, and Israeli forces eventually withdrew. Following the invasion, a vicious civil war between Christian and Muslim militia flared up again before a fragile peace was restored eight years later.

GETTY IMAGES

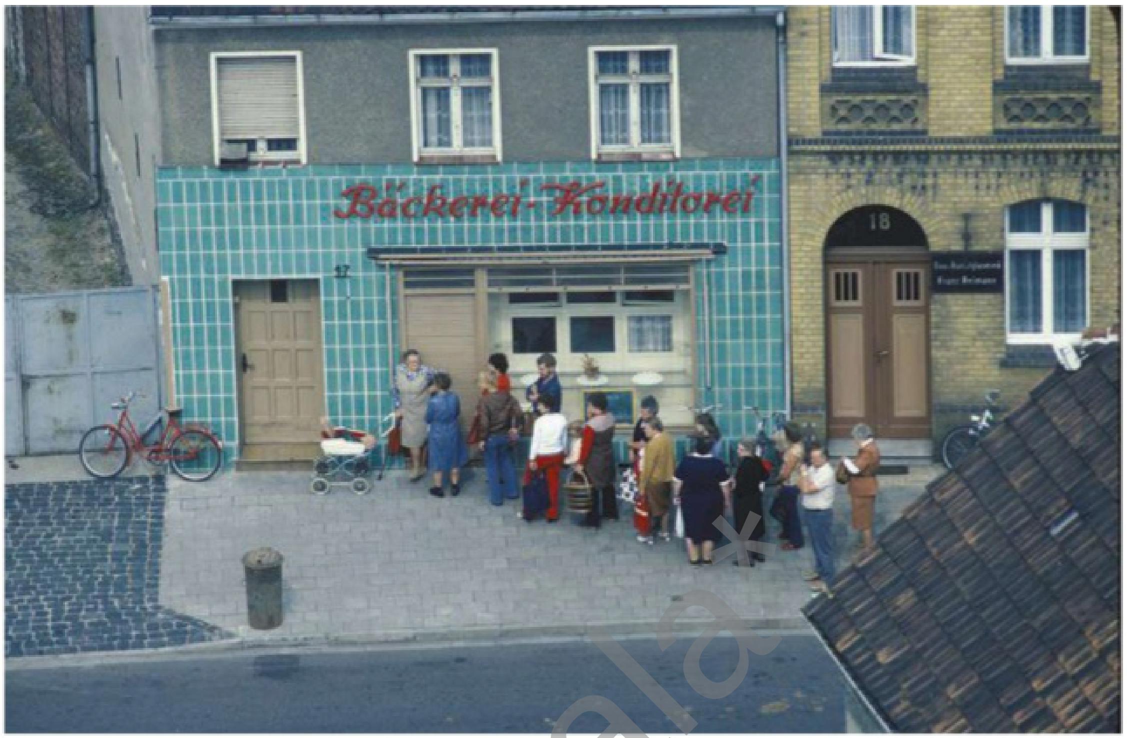
→


Naresh Jaiwala

Searching for survivors

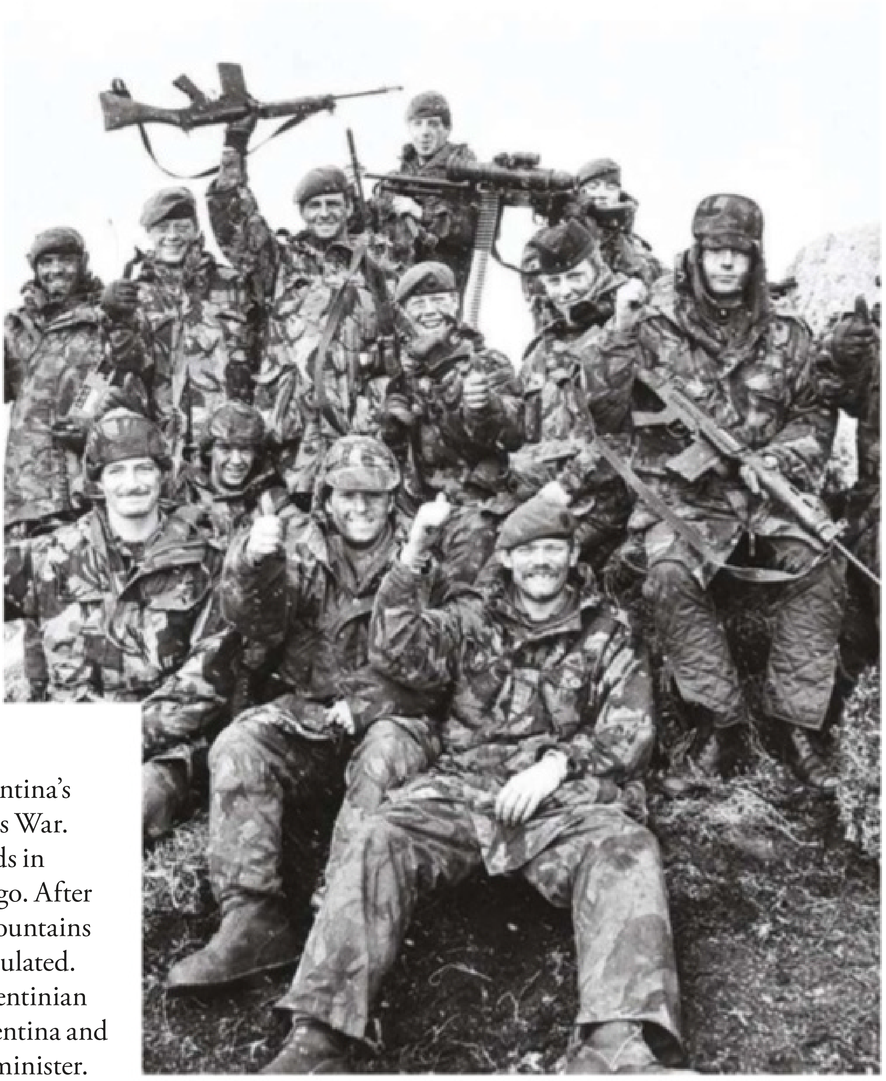
Rescue workers survey the crash site of Air Florida Flight 90, which on 13 January 1982 hit the 14th Street Bridge over the Potomac River in Washington DC before plunging into the icy water. The pilots of the Boeing 737, scheduled to fly from Washington to Florida, had failed to activate the engine anti-ice system; ice built up on the wings and nose-cone, and the plane stalled shortly after take-off. Of the 74 passengers and five crew, only four passengers and one flight attendant survived.

GETTY IMAGES



On the breadline

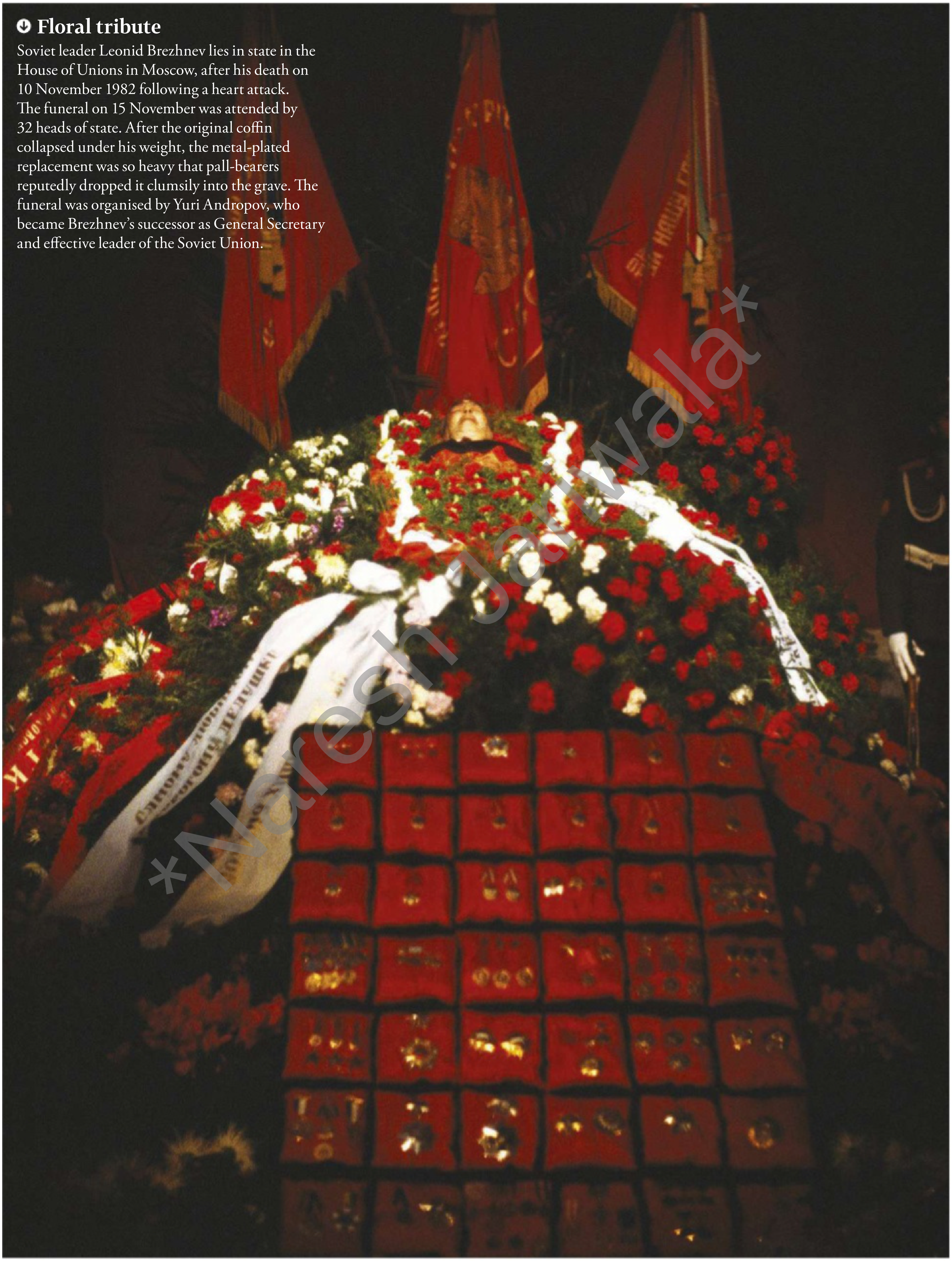
A queue of shoppers in the East German town of Jüterbog waits for a bakery to open. Despite the promise that a communist economy would serve the interests of the people, citizens of the German Democratic Republic experienced years of shortages following the collectivisation drive of the 1950s, resulting in queuing, empty shelves and products of indifferent quality. The gap between communist rhetoric and social reality played no small part in the collapse of the regime in 1990.



Tumbledown triumph

Scots Guards on Mount Tumbledown celebrate Argentina's surrender on 14 June 1982, ending the brief Falklands War. A large task force had been sent to the Falkland Islands in early April after Argentine forces seized the archipelago. After weeks of bitter fighting, British troops reached the mountains surrounding the capital, Stanley, and Argentina capitulated. British victory, at the cost of 255 British and 649 Argentinian dead troops, brought down the military junta in Argentina and strengthened Margaret Thatcher's position as prime minister.

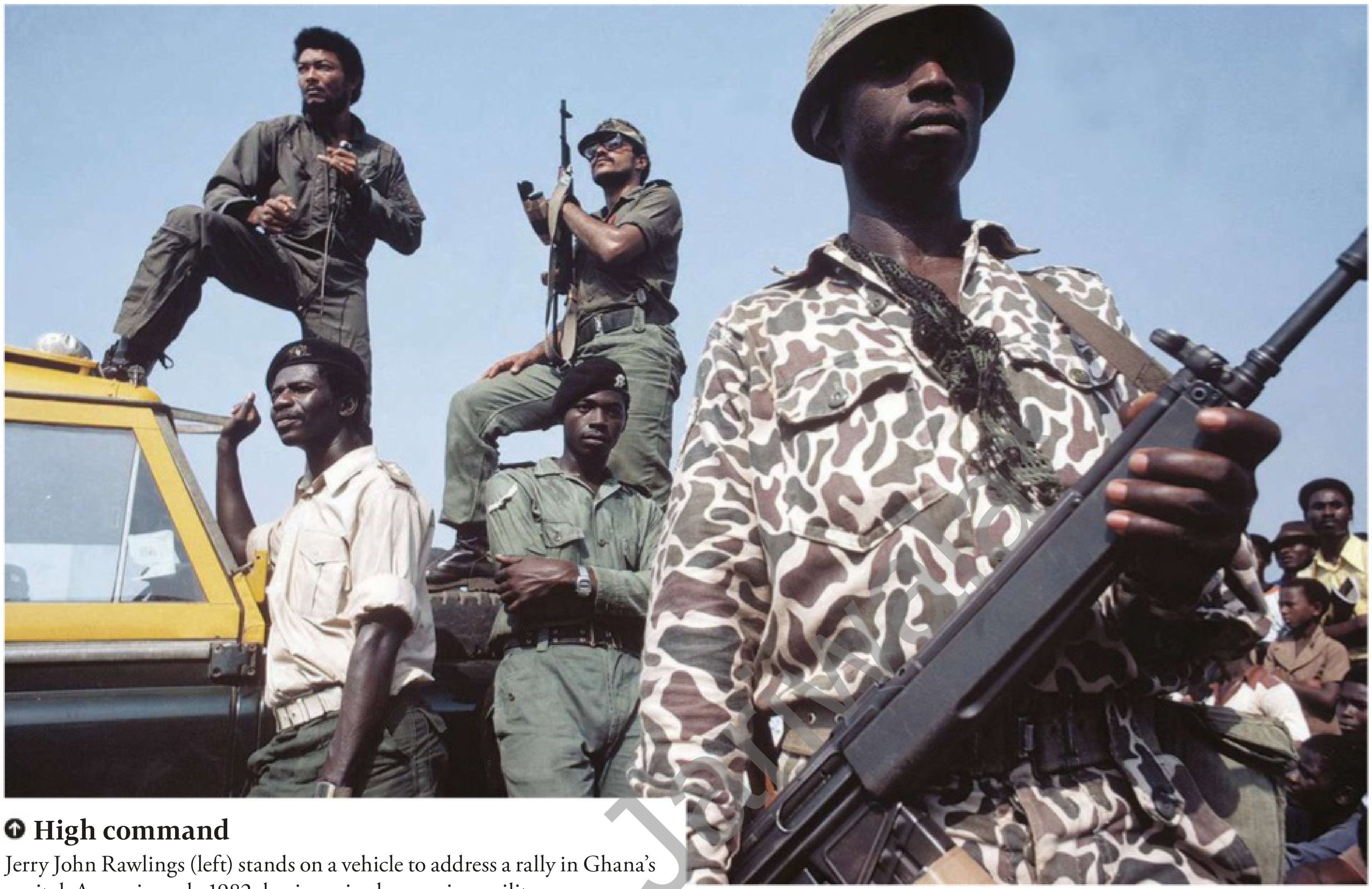
AKG-IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES



Floral tribute

Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev lies in state in the House of Unions in Moscow, after his death on 10 November 1982 following a heart attack. The funeral on 15 November was attended by 32 heads of state. After the original coffin collapsed under his weight, the metal-plated replacement was so heavy that pall-bearers reputedly dropped it clumsily into the grave. The funeral was organised by Yuri Andropov, who became Brezhnev's successor as General Secretary and effective leader of the Soviet Union.

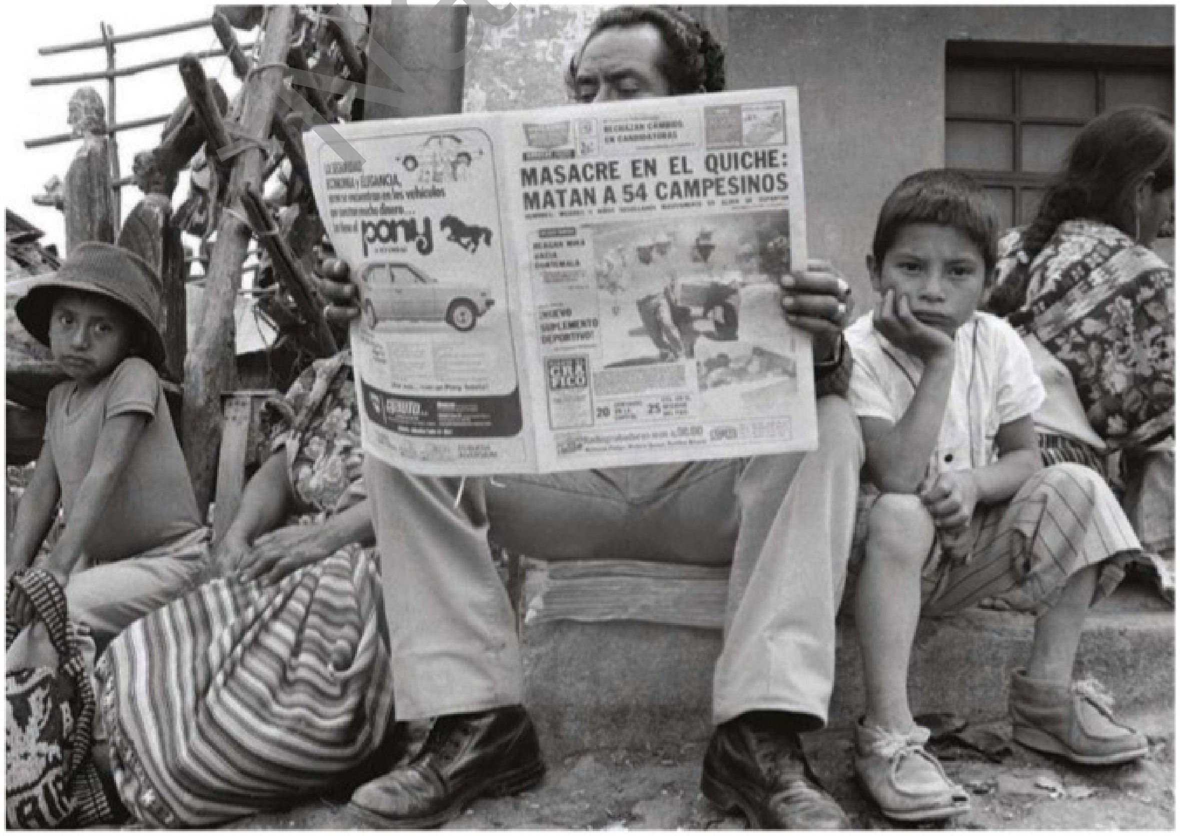
GETTY IMAGES



High command

Jerry John Rawlings (left) stands on a vehicle to address a rally in Ghana's capital, Accra, in early 1982, having seized power in a military coup on the final day of the previous year. The Air Force flight lieutenant had earlier led a coup in 1979 before restoring the democratic government. After the 1981 takeover, though, he retained power at the head of a military junta through his Provisional National Defence Council. After overcoming economic crises in his early years as national leader, Rawlings steadied Ghana's finances and in 1992 was elected president in democratic elections; he remained head of state till 2001.

Naresh Jaiswal



Horror in the headlines

A man reads news of the massacre of 54 villagers in El Quiche, Guatemala, in 1982 by government-backed forces. During the long civil war, the Guatemalan army and security forces engaged in a brutal campaign against the indigenous Maya peoples of the highlands, burning villages and slaughtering their inhabitants. This campaign intensified after General Efraín Ríos Montt took power in a March 1982 coup; the crescendo of violence peaked that year, but repression continued for much of the decade. Montt was later tried for genocide and crimes against humanity, but died in 2018 before a final verdict could be reached.

GETTY IMAGES

Richard Overy is professor of history at the University of Exeter, and editor of *The Times Complete History of the World* (William Collins, 2015)

Sanmao (1943–91)

GLOBETROTTING ICON OF CHINESE YOUTH

Challenging norms of Chinese society, a young nomad offered her compatriots visions of a different kind of life. **Mike Fu** introduces a groundbreaking writer and traveller

"Don't ask me where I'm from," opens the song 'Olive Tree', a folksy Chinese language ballad covered time and again since the late 1970s. "My home is far away…" The song is at once melancholic and hopeful, a rumination on place and belonging by a writer who professes to be rootless and wandering. While extolling the beauty of nature, the few verses manage to convey the ethereal and the illusory. The lyrics reveal a little of the nature of the woman who penned them over 40 years ago, known alternately as Echo, Chen Ping and Sanmao. Impish polyglot, literary idol, she provided a symbol of generational yearnings, her life defined by upheaval and romance in equal measure.

By her untimely death in early 1991, Sanmao was an accomplished writer, translator and cultural icon in Greater China, with nearly two dozen books to her name. Her collections of stories traced the arc of her unprecedented trajectory, from childhood mischief in Taipei to a maudlin coming of age in western Europe, from the ache and wonderment of life in western Africa to the ineffable humanity she discovered in the Canary Islands, across Latin America and wherever she roamed.

Sanmao was born Chen Maoping in the south-western Chinese municipality of Chongqing (formerly Romanised as Chungking), the second daughter of a middle-class family. According to an oft-retold anecdote, she dropped the first character 'mao' in her given name because the character's complexity was too difficult for her to write as a child.

The precocious Chen Ping clashed frequently with school authorities and societal expectations during her upbringing in Taiwan, to where the family relocated in the late 1940s during the Chinese Civil War. A bookworm at heart, Chen began devouring all manner of Chinese and western literature from a young age. In the 1960s, she ventured abroad – at a time when very few Chinese women had the freedom or courage to move about independently – making her home in Madrid, West Berlin and Chicago, and adopting the name Echo among her western friends.

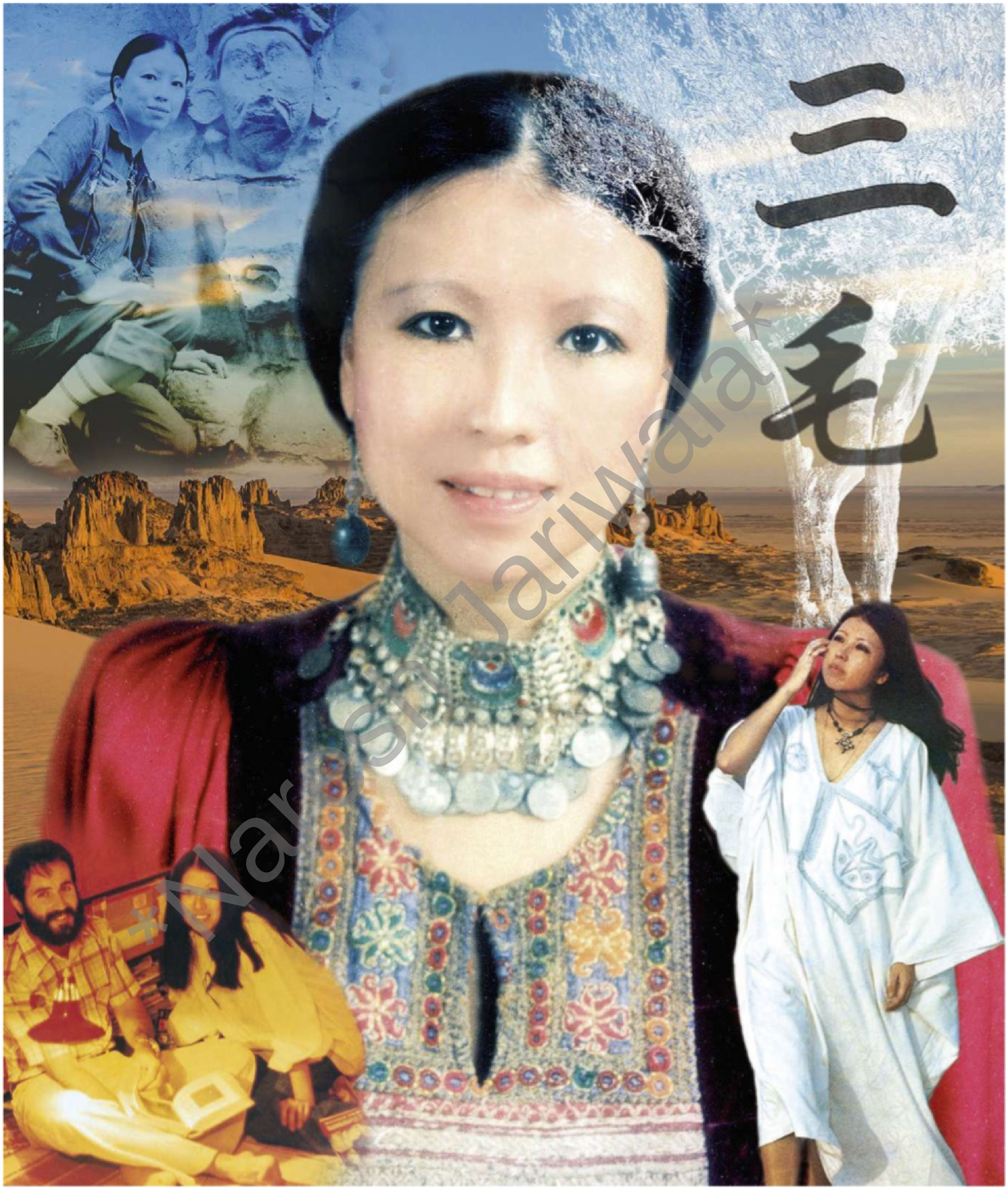
Several years later, Echo returned to Taipei and became engaged to her lover, a 40-something teacher from Germany. Her fiancé's sudden death from a heart attack sent her into a period of despondence that led to a suicide attempt. After her recovery, she left Taiwan in haste and headed to Africa, by way of Spain. In 1974 Echo married an old friend from Madrid, José María Quero, in the town of El-Aaiún (sometimes spelled Laâyoune), provincial capital of the Spanish Sahara. Her sketches of life in the colonial desert began to appear in Taiwan's *United Daily News*, garnering a considerable popular readership. Autobiographical in nature, these tales introduced the author and protagonist as a first-person narrator by yet another name: Sanmao.

Sanmao rocketed to fame in 1976 with the release of the collected *Stories of the Sahara* by Taiwanese publisher Crown. Her candid tales of misadventure and poignant vignettes of the human condition were widely acclaimed in Taiwan, Hong Kong and, eventually, mainland China. In her narratives, her husband José appears as both foil and protector. Only a stoic and pragmatic man like him could match the fiery, wily Sanmao. He understands her intuitively, and wants her to be herself to the utmost. Through her portrayal of their partnership, Sanmao's earnest, egalitarian sensibilities and casual worldliness cast her as a figure of devotion for millions of youth, especially young women.

Following years in the western Sahara, after Spain relinquished the territory in 1975 José and Sanmao relocated to the Canary Islands, where she continued to write about her quotidian existence with empathy and self-reflection. In 1979, José died in a freak diving accident, aged just 27. Sanmao returned to Taiwan, but remained in the literary and cultural spotlight. She produced many more essays and travelogues, translated the Argentine comic strip *Mafalda* into Chinese and wrote dozens of songs as well as a screenplay, filmed as *Red Dust* (1990). She took her own life at the age of 47.

"Why do I wander, wander so far away?" laments 'Olive Tree'. The song hauntingly encapsulates Sanmao's bittersweet devotion to a vagabond life. Decades later, her words continue to resonate with wayward youth and middle-aged nostalgics alike. This world, with all its capacity for sorrow and joy, could never be as peaceful as the eponymous olive trees of her dreams. But in wandering, one finds solace; in the simple truths of nature, divine meaning.

Mike Fu is a New York-based writer, editor and translator into English of Sanmao's *Stories of the Sahara* (Bloomsbury, 2019)



©HUANG CHEN TIEN HSIN, CHUNG SHANG AND CHEN CHIECH THROUGH CROWN PUB CO LTD

Vagabond soul

Born in China, raised in Taiwan, but with a hunger to explore the wider world, Sanmao refused to be limited by societal norms. Making a home in spots as disparate as Germany, the US and, most significantly, Spanish Sahara, her lifestyle and writing inspired millions of young women in Greater China

ILLUSTRATION BY **ROSEMARY SMITH**

"Incorrect. 150 volts."

"GET ME OUT OF HERE. I TOLD YOU I HAD HEART TROUBLE.

After the Second World War, researchers developed bold, shocking new experiments in a bid to understand how the horrors of the Holocaust could have happened. **David Edmonds** explores their story

ACCOMPANIES THE BBC RADIO 4 PROGRAMME **THE SCIENCE OF EVIL**

GET ME OUT OF HERE... PLEASE!"

FROM THE FILM OBEDIENCE © 1965 BY STANLEY MILGRAM © RENEWED 1993 BY ALEXANDRA MILGRAM - DISTRIBUTED BY ALEXANDER STREET PRESS

→

If you were instructed to inflict pain on another person in the cause of an academic experiment, how far would you go? If that person was in agony, pleading with you to stop, would you persist nonetheless? That's the question that Yale psychologist Stanley Milgram wanted to test.

The year is 1961. Milgram has lured subjects to his laboratory with the promise of $4 for an hour's work. An advertisement claims that participants will assist in a study on memory. When a volunteer turns up, they're joined by a second 'volunteer' and the two people draw lots to choose who's to be the 'learner' and who the 'teacher'. Unbeknown to the genuine volunteer, it's all a setup. The genuine volunteer is given the role of teacher. The learner is an actor.

A man in a white lab coat explains how the experiment will proceed. The teacher will sit in one room, the learner (the actor) in a separate booth. The learner is strapped into a chair and hooked up to an electricity generator. In front of the teacher is a set of small switches. The teacher is told that his job (in this experiment it's always a 'he') is to read out pairs of words that the learner has to remember and then repeat. If the learner gets it wrong, the teacher must administer an electric shock. After the first mistake, he is to flick the first switch, delivering 15 volts; after the second mistake, he pulls the second – 30 volts, and so on. The final switch, 450 volts, is marked 'danger – severe shock'.

When Milgram declared his results, they delivered another form of shock. Despite the screams from the booth, and despite expressing reservations about the suffering they were inflicting on 'learners', nearly two thirds of 'teachers' had been prepared to go all the way – eventually tripping the switch marked 450 volts.

The experiment made Milgram famous – or at least as famous as is possible for an academic working within what was then an obscure and relatively new branch of psychology, a branch that had emerged from hatred and war.

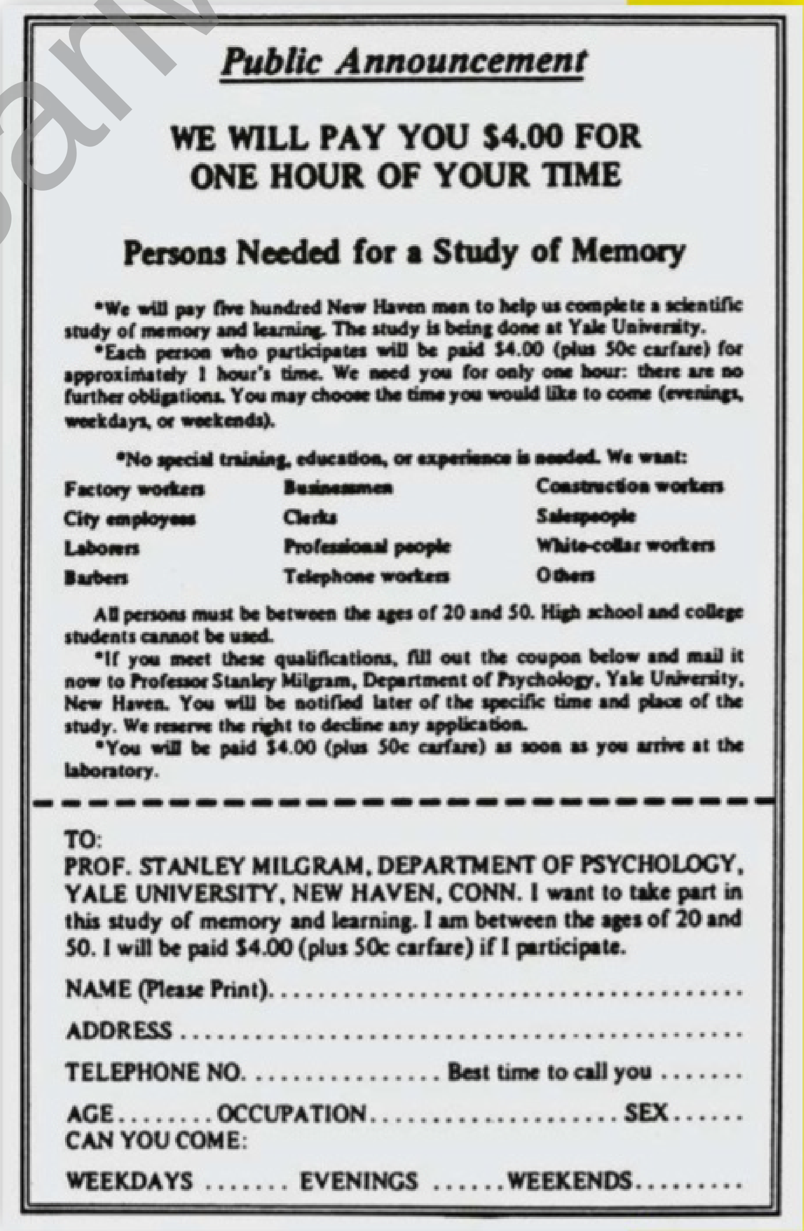
Understanding evil

Stanley Milgram was born on 15 August 1933, just months after Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany. Both of Milgram's parents were Jewish immigrants to the US, and close relatives remained in eastern Europe. During the Second World War, the family would gather round the radio listening fretfully to the news, wondering what had become of Stanley's aunts.

The full extent of the atrocities perpetrated against Jewish people and other minorities became apparent only at the war's end. Six million Jews systematically exterminated: how was this possible? How could people have starved, tortured and murdered other men, women and children on an industrial scale? How could entire groups have been so dehumanised? How could millions of bystanders have allowed it to happen?

In 1961, several thousand miles from Milgram's lab in Yale University in Connecticut, a reminder of the Holocaust appeared daily in Jerusalem: a bald, bespectacled, innocuous-looking man in a suit sitting in a glass booth. That man was

THE EXPERIMENT BECAME FAMOUS IN A NEW BRANCH OF PSYCHOLOGY – ONE THAT EMERGED FROM HATRED AND WAR



Public Announcement

WE WILL PAY YOU $4.00 FOR ONE HOUR OF YOUR TIME

Persons Needed for a Study of Memory

*We will pay five hundred New Haven men to help us complete a scientific study of memory and learning. The study is being done at Yale University.

*Each person who participates will be paid $4.00 (plus 50c carfare) for approximately 1 hour's time. We need you for only one hour: there are no further obligations. You may choose the time you would like to come (evenings, weekdays, or weekends).

*No special training, education, or experience is needed. We want:

Factory workers
City employees
Laborers
Barbers
Businessmen
Clerks
Professional people
Telephone workers
Construction workers
Salespeople
White-collar workers
Others

All persons must be between the ages of 20 and 50. High school and college students cannot be used.

*If you meet these qualifications, fill out the coupon below and mail it now to Professor Stanley Milgram, Department of Psychology, Yale University, New Haven. You will be notified later of the specific time and place of the study. We reserve the right to decline any application.

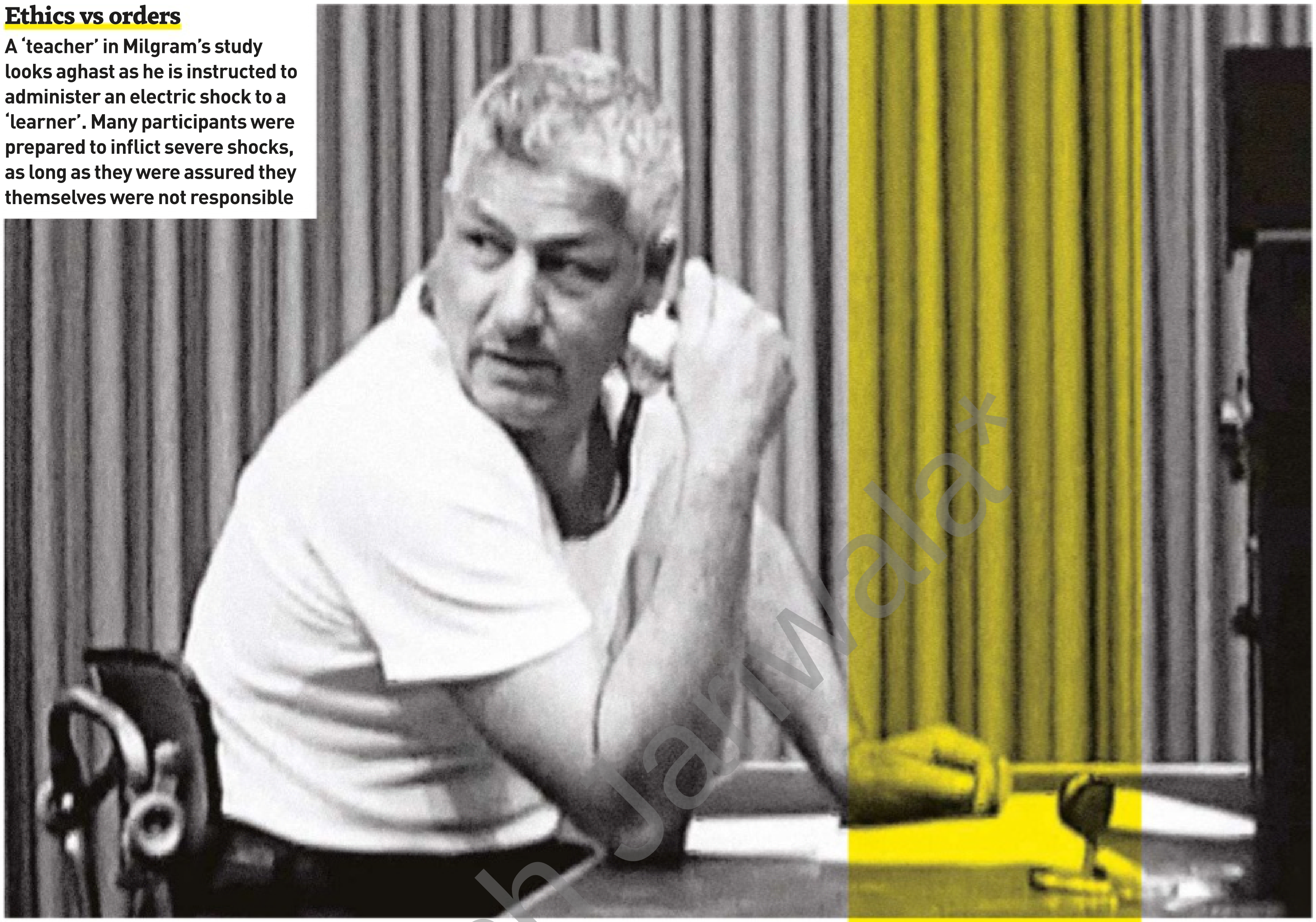
*You will be paid $4.00 (plus 50c carfare) as soon as you arrive at the laboratory.

TO:
PROF. STANLEY MILGRAM, DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY, YALE UNIVERSITY, NEW HAVEN, CONN. I want to take part in this study of memory and learning. I am between the ages of 20 and 50. I will be paid $4.00 (plus 50c carfare) if I participate.

NAME (Please Print)..
ADDRESS ....
TELEPHONE NO. .... Best time to call you ....
AGE........OCCUPATION.................... SEX......
CAN YOU COME:
WEEKDAYS .... EVENINGS ......WEEKENDS.........

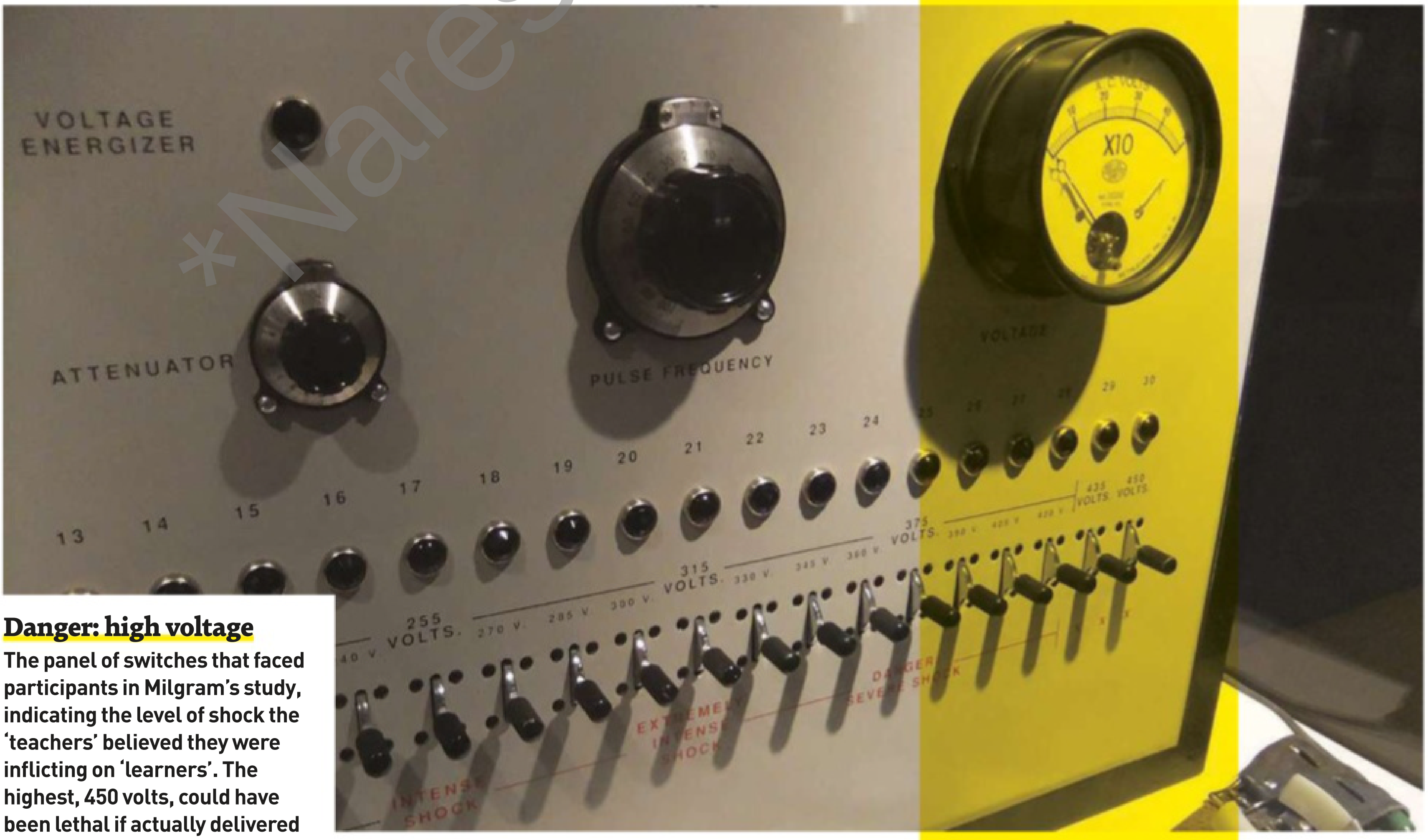
A call for participants in one of Stanley Milgram's pioneering 1960s studies – not, in fact, of memory but of the extreme actions that might result from obedience to authority

ALAMY



Ethics vs orders

A ‘teacher’ in Milgram’s study looks aghast as he is instructed to administer an electric shock to a ‘learner’. Many participants were prepared to inflict severe shocks, as long as they were assured they themselves were not responsible


VOLTAGE ENERGIZER
ATTENUATOR
PULSE FREQUENCY
VOLTAGE
X10
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
29
30
255 VOLTS
270 V.
285 V.
300 V.
315 VOLTS
330 V.
345 V.
360 V.
375 VOLTS
435 VOLTS
450 VOLTS
INTENSE SHOCK
EXTREME INTENSITY SHOCK
DANGER: SEVERE SHOCK

Danger: high voltage

The panel of switches that faced participants in Milgram’s study, indicating the level of shock the ‘teachers’ believed they were inflicting on ‘learners’. The highest, 450 volts, could have been lethal if actually delivered

ISABELLE ADAM/ FROM OBEDIENCE © 1965 STANLEY MILGRAM © RENEWED 1993 ALEXANDRA MILGRAM - DIST. BY ALEXANDER STREET PRESS

Naresh Jarwala

Exposing the horror
German citizens are forced to view victims of Wöbbelin concentration camp in 1945. Several early social psychology experiments were attempts to understand the complicity of many Germans in the horrors of the Holocaust

Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi SS officer who had been charged with organising the mass deportation of Jews to their deaths in concentration and extermination camps.

Eichmann's trial captivated Israel. Fifteen years after the end of the Second World War, the Holocaust remained a taboo subject. Few survivors had wanted to talk about their experiences; in a perverse way, victimhood was considered almost shaming. The Jewish German-born political philosopher Hannah Arendt, in Jerusalem to cover the trial for *The New Yorker*, delivered her hugely contentious verdict on the accused: Eichmann was an apparatchik – a mere functionary, a cog in a bureaucratic system – and his evil was "banal". Eichmann himself insisted he had merely been "following orders". It was not enough to save him from a guilty verdict and the hangman's rope.

But what of his defence? Is it possible that people do bad things just because they're told to? Was there something unique in German culture that promoted or legitimised such blind obedience? Initially, Milgram suspected so. It could never happen in the United States, he thought. But his experiments convinced him of his naivety.

Obedience and betrayal

Milgram's obedience experiments cemented the credentials of social psychology, the discipline that investigates how our thoughts, feelings and behaviour are influenced by others.

The man often credited as its founding father was the German-born psychologist Kurt Lewin. He had been visiting the US to deliver a series of lectures when Hitler became Chancellor. Immediately grasping that his academic career at home was over, he chose to move to the US, and eventually found a position at the University of Iowa.

It was there that he conducted the experiment for which he is best known. Struck by the difference between the political atmosphere in Germany and that in his adopted country, he devised a way to study how this affected behaviour. Boys were invited to join craft-making clubs. Some of these clubs were spearheaded by 'democratic' leaders who were decent to the children and welcomed their input into decision-making. Others were run in 'totalitarian' fashion: leaders barked curt orders, and never explained their decisions or justified their praise or blame.

The experiment produced intriguing results. For example, when the group leader left the room, anarchy was more likely to break out in the totalitarian group than the democratic one. But in many ways what was more significant was the focus of Lewin's research – the influence on the individual of others – combined with the experimental method.

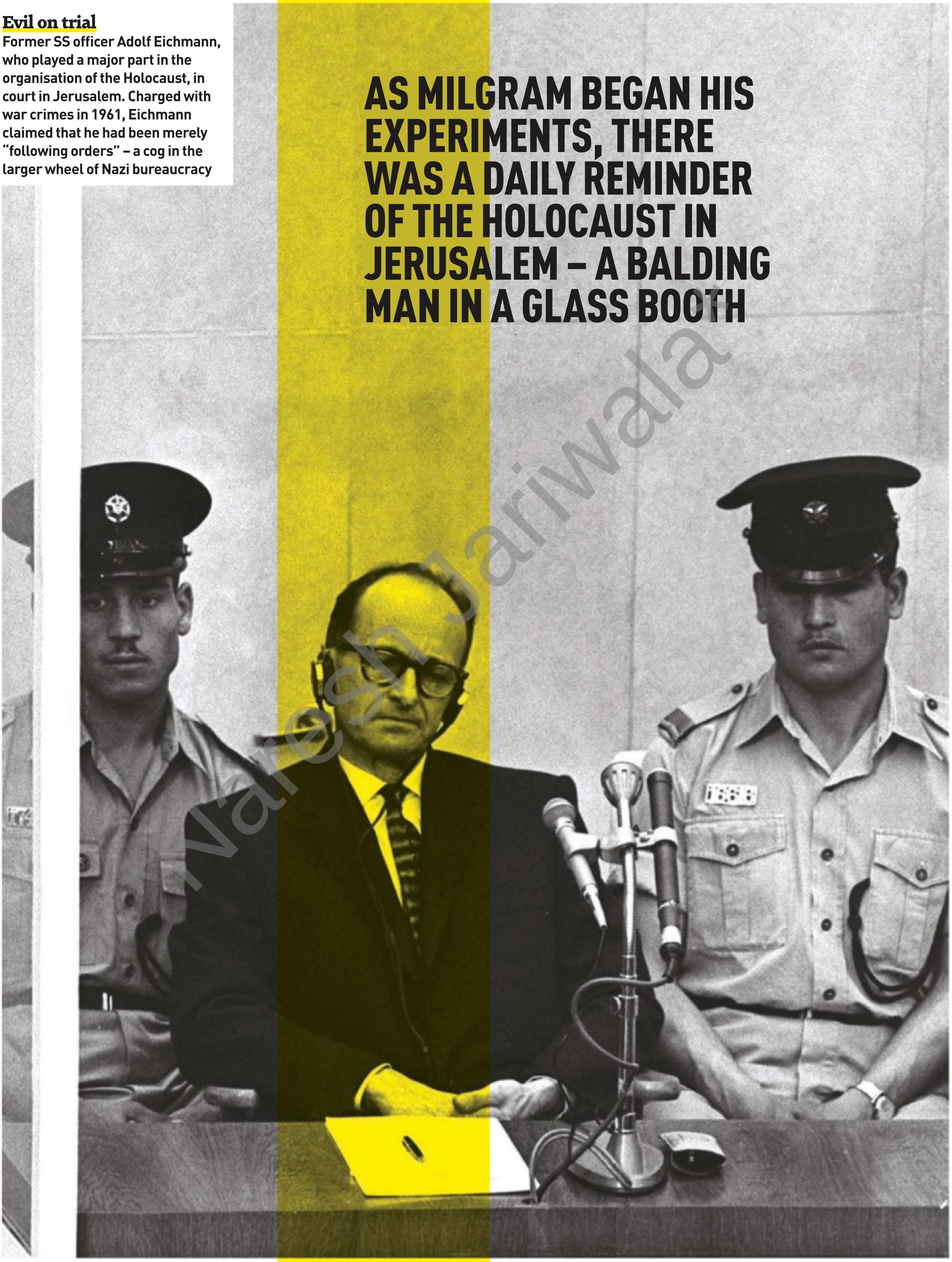
Where Lewin led, many others followed – though, post-Lewin, their experiments have tended to be conducted not in a real-life setting but in the laboratory. There were numerous psychologists I could have spotlighted in my recent BBC documentary but, besides Lewin and Milgram, I chose to emphasise three: Solomon Asch, Serge Moscovici and Henri Tajfel.

As was the case with many other social psychologists of the era, one thing the five men had in common was the Holocaust. Milgram was the only one of the five not to be uprooted from

GETTY IMAGES

Evil on trial
Former SS officer Adolf Eichmann, who played a major part in the organisation of the Holocaust, in court in Jerusalem. Charged with war crimes in 1961, Eichmann claimed that he had been merely "following orders" – a cog in the larger wheel of Nazi bureaucracy

AS MILGRAM BEGAN HIS EXPERIMENTS, THERE WAS A DAILY REMINDER OF THE HOLOCAUST IN JERUSALEM – A BALDING MAN IN A GLASS BOOTH



GETTY IMAGES

→

the land of his birth. A young Asch moved with his family from Poland to the United States. Tajfel, also Polish-born but later a student in France, volunteered to fight for the French when war broke out but was captured by the Germans; how he survived detention remains a mystery, though it probably entailed keeping his Jewishness secret. Born in Romania, Moscovici survived internment in a forced-labour camp during the war before moving to France. He witnessed the Bucharest pogrom of 1941, during which mobs stormed Jewish homes, raping, murdering, and inflicting torture too barbaric to describe. The memories played on Moscovici's nerves for the rest of his life. All five men lost relatives in the war. Virtually Tajfel's entire family was murdered, including his mother, father and brother. In later life he found it almost impossibly painful to speak in his mother tongue.

The immigrants naturally retained an outsider's sensibility. All combined a strong Jewish identity with a weak attachment to religious doctrine, though in some cases that changed with age. In 1977, Milgram humorously declined a university meeting that had been fixed for Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year), replying with the quip: "Sorry for the inconvenience, but this particular holiday was scheduled 5,738 years ago, and therefore has my prior commitment."

A discipline of deception

In trying to comprehend the Holocaust, social psychologists sought a variety of explanations. Milgram, as we've seen, was interested in obedience and the extent to which people's consciences provide any check on our deference to authority. By contrast, what fascinated Solomon Asch was how we are swayed by opinion: will we go along with something if everyone else does? He tested this in his conformity experiments, which went like this.

Imagine that you are the subject. You arrive in the lab to participate in what you've been told is an experiment about perception. You are given a seat in a room in which six other volunteers are already seated. The test is apparently straightforward. Two cards are held up. On the first card is one line; on the second card are three lines. You merely have to say which of the lines on the second card, labelled 1 2 and 3, is the same length as the line on the first one.

All seven of you give the same answer. The experiment is then repeated with different lines. Again, the response is unanimous. But then something weird happens. On the third go, everyone else gives an answer which seems obviously wrong: they say 2, when it appears to you that the answer must be 3. Are your eyes deceiving you? How do you respond?

Asch observed that those who took part in the experiment found the experience – seeing others contradict clear evidence right before their eyes – an unnerving one. A remarkable number of people were influenced by what everyone else said. As you have by now very likely guessed, the other six participants in Asch's study were actors, in experimental terms called 'confederates', pretending to be genuine volunteers.

Pioneer psychologist
Kurt Lewin, considered the founding father of social psychology. Born in Germany but choosing to move to the US after Hitler came to power, Lewin's work led to wider understanding of the concept of group dynamics

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY'S PIONEERS THOUGHT A LITTLE DECEPTION WAS A PRICE WORTH PAYING, GIVEN WHAT WAS AT STAKE

ALAMY

THE BAR OF JUSTICE

The social order

Boys are given instructions in one of Kurt Lewin's seminal experiments on the impact of various leadership styles. His focus on the influence on the individual over others was at the heart of new ideas of social psychology

INTERNET ARCHIVE

Deception was at the heart of many other social psychology experiments. Moscovici used a deceptive setup to investigate whether minorities could influence the majority. His subjects were asked to distinguish between green and blue slides; Moscovici recorded how they were affected by a couple of confederates giving the wrong answer.

Tajfel first asked a group of boys to rate a set of paintings; they were then separated into a (Paul) Klee group and a (Wassily) Kandinsky group, and were told that this division was based on their assessment of the paintings. In fact, they were split up at random. They were then given money to share out among boys from both groups. Tajfel's ingenious experiment revealed how easily humans divide into groups and then discriminate against other groups.

No doubt the pioneers of social psychology thought that a little deception and some discomfort among their subjects was a price worth paying, given what was at stake. Perhaps they are right, though not everyone agrees. Some of Milgram's subjects were traumatised: one man later described how he would scan the obituaries of the newspapers to see if the person who had been electrocuted had died.

Ethical concerns are among the reasons why some of these experiments are now being reconsidered with a more critical eye. In some cases, the results are also being reinterpreted. It's been alleged that Milgram was loose with his recording and publishing of the data. He repeated the experiment several times, adjusting it in minor ways: for example, in one variation the orders of the 'teacher' were relayed by phone rather than in person. Overall, taking into account all variations, the majority of people in Milgram's experiments defied the experimenters, or at least failed to follow all instructions. Still, despite some critical reappraisal, the social psychology fashioned in the shadow of the Holocaust successfully mapped out the discipline. The classic early studies on obedience and conformity and group discrimination still define the contours of social psychology today.

Social psychology is currently beset by a 'replication crisis'. Attempts to replicate many headline-grabbing recent studies have failed. According to one of Britain's leading social psychologists, Steve Reicher, the problem is that these days many social psychologists take a cavalier attitude to publication because they lack passion. For them, Reicher argues, social psychology is a career; beyond that, there is little personal at stake.

Nobody could level that charge at the pioneers. They were desperate to tackle racism and discrimination. "It was not in their interest to publish something they didn't believe," says Reicher, "because it would get in the way of a science that could make a difference". For the founders of social psychology, whose relatives had been murdered in the ditches and camps of Europe in the Holocaust, understanding the science of evil was literally a matter of life and death. 🌐

David Edmonds is a writer and BBC journalist. Listen to *The Science of Evil*, his *Archive on 4* programme on social psychology, at: *bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000drbx*

The Conversation

"The idea that art provokes sex goes right back to the very origin of the western female nude"

Mary Beard talks to **Matt Elton** about her BBC Two series *Shock of the Nude*, exploring the power of the nude to shape ideas about gender and sex. Plus, on page 78, she discusses three key works with art historian **Janina Ramirez**

ACCOMPANIES THE BBC TWO DOCUMENTARY
MARY BEARD'S SHOCK OF THE NUDE

CLAIRE WITKIN-BBC PICTURES

Mary Beard with a statue at the Museum of Classical Archaeology, Cambridge, during the filming of *Shock of the Nude*. "I've been very surprised at the vehemence of the reaction to the series," she says

→

"Christianity, at some level, undermined the sense that the naked male body was a symbol of citizenly goodness"

Matt Elton: What inspired you to make a documentary on the subject of nudity?

Mary Beard: My team and I were looking for a topic in the history of art that people really want to argue about – that still makes people cross, or puzzled, or take very different views. An awful lot of art history comes down to admiration, whereas the nude is a subject about which there are still controversies. So it was fun to try to unpick those controversies and how we might resolve them.

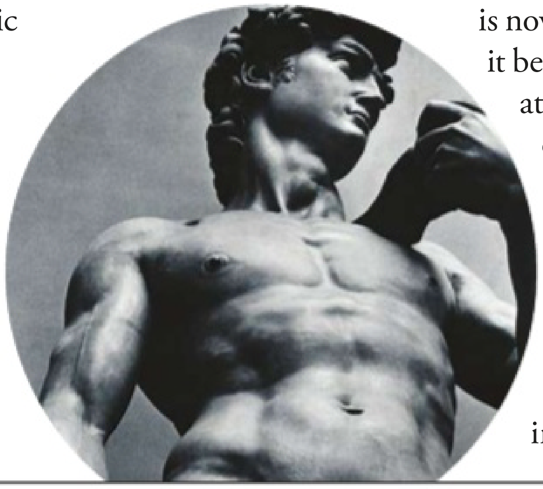
And some of your comments have indeed caused a bit of a stir. You said, for instance, that "female nudes in western art are soft porn for the elite dressed up in a classical guise".

I didn't quite say that! When these things get reported, they get cruder and cruder the further they go down the food chain. I can't remember the exact words, but what I think I actually said was that you've got to face the question of *whether* nudes are soft porn for the elite. Committed gallery-goers tend to be terribly sniffy when they hear someone say: "Oh, this is just soft porn for the elite, isn't it?" I can be sniffy about that, too, but I still think it's a question you have to ask.

I'm not sure whether there is an answer, but when you look at some nudes in some art you do wonder what the difference is between them and soft porn. It's an issue that comes over very clearly in one of the paintings that we feature in the documentary – [French artist] Gustave Courbet's 1866 painting *L'Origine du monde* ('Origin of the World' – see page 79). It's a very detailed, hyperrealistic painting of a woman's genitals. She doesn't have a head and she doesn't have any limbs.

How do we explain why this is in a gallery and is a masterpiece, whereas we would be much more likely to find similar photographs of the same subject matter in a not-wholly-salubrious shop? When it comes to the human body there isn't a straight divide. Whether something is porn or art is partly in the eye of the beholder.

Michelangelo's 16th-century sculpture *David* became "the fridge-magnet version of the male nude", Beard suggests



GETTY IMAGES

Were you surprised by how difficult it is for people to navigate that boundary?

I've certainly been very surprised at the vehemence of the reaction I've had to this series, even down to the rather crude, semi-accurate quoting of what I said. It's remarkable how really violent people get when they're confronted with the difficulty of this distinction. Looking at some of the Twitter responses, you think: "Blimey, we *do* need a programme investigating these issues". People aren't just sounding off – they're being threatening. I've had people write: "I think she needs to be punched every day" – for saying that there might be a problem with the difference between art and porn! You think: "Wow, why is this so difficult?" In a way, I think that these kinds of reactions justify the programme.

The programmes vividly illustrate that this has always been a subject that's got people animated and angry. You open with Praxiteles' fourth-century BC statue of Aphrodite [pictured right] for instance. What reaction did that cause?

Praxiteles' statue is what we believe to be the first full-size sculpture of a female nude in Greece, and probably the entire west. It's a very puzzling piece: we have no idea why, after centuries of sculptors representing women clothed, Praxiteles chose to sculpt the goddess Aphrodite in the nude. What we *do* know is that it was instantly quite difficult for people. The first clients he offered it to said no, thank you, and it ended up being taken by the city of Knidos in what is now Turkey. They got lucky in a way, because it became a huge, slightly notorious tourist attraction – they put it on the ancient equivalent of fridge magnets.

But there are lots of stories about it that show very clearly how difficult it was for people. There's one famous story, described centuries later, about a young man who fell in love with the statue and managed to get locked up with her in the temple. And then he tried to... well, Mary Beard at Crawford Art Gallery in Cork. "Why and how do we let some people look at some things and not others? Why are there fig leaves on some things but not others?" she asks

"have his way with her" is what books usually say. The story goes that he left the "mark of his seed" on her thigh, before throwing himself off a cliff.

When classicists read that story, they often say: "Isn't that odd?" And yes, in some ways it is an odd story – but really it's about how art provokes human desire. When, today, you say that the nude is implicated in the male gaze and male desire, people tend to think that's an invention of radical feminists in the 1960s and 70s. But the idea that art provokes sex goes right back to the very origin of the western female nude.

Why, for so long, was the nude a female nude?

I don't think it really was. The historical truth is that, although the female nude was the nude that caused anxiety, there had been male nudes in the Greek world long beforehand. Early Greek sculpture of men, back to the seventh century BC, was usually naked.

This demonstrates a really puzzling difference between the representation of the male body and the female body. In some ways, the male body in the classical world wasn't much associated with desire, but instead with virtue and good citizenship. You saw the virtue of the classical citizen in the virtue of their naked body – but you didn't see that in women, who weren't active citizens. They didn't have any political rights and their bodies were viewed quite differently.

It's really quite striking that, today, what you can and cannot show of the male body – for instance, on television – is more restricted than what you can show of the female body. I think this would have amazed the classical Greeks.

Why do you think that is?

It's almost impossible to give a simple answer to these kinds of questions. But it's partly due to the fact that Christianity, at some level, changed and undermined the sense that the naked male body, genitals and all, was a symbol of citizenly goodness. It became much more associated with sex and desire.

You can see that, for instance, in Michelangelo's [16th-century sculpture] *David*. That became the fridge-magnet version of the male nude: people, me included, still flock in

A replica of Praxiteles' fourth-century BC statue of Aphrodite, believed to be the first full-size sculpture of a female nude in the west

CLAIRE WITKIN–BBC PICTURES/ALAMY

→

> *"No other culture has obsessed about the naked body and its sexuality in the way the west has since the ancient Greeks"*

our millions to see it. I think that Michelangelo was, in many ways, trying to recapture some of the sense of the classical body as being a version of citizenly virtue. But the citizens of Florence didn't think that. They threw things at it, and within a few weeks they had fitted it with a little belt of low-hanging leaves, in order to disguise its genitals. They remained covered up till the very end of the 19th century.

Can looking at non-western art help us understand why western art was so fascinated by the nude for so long?

Looking at non-western cultures puts western culture very much into perspective – and, you might almost say, into its place. When we were putting the series together, we decided not to do a complete world tour of naked bodies in art. That's not because there aren't the most amazing representations of the naked human body in almost every culture you can find across the planet, but because we felt strongly that there wasn't another culture that quite obsessed about the naked body and its sexuality in the way that western culture has done since the ancient Greeks.

In the west, for example, it's often assumed that a basic, central part of training for young artists will be to draw the naked body. And we wanted to show that, if you look at other cultures, they're not doing that. I think that we in the west are weirdly fascinated with nudity, whereas other cultures view the naked body in a way that is much less sexualised and much less fetishised.

When you look at a wonderful Yoruba headdress from Nigeria featuring a naked female, it's very clear that it's an object celebrating community and women's role at the centre of the community. That's significantly different from most of the ways in which the west has treated the female nude. Another of those big questions is why the west has gone down this route – and, again, it's very difficult to say. But asking that question is an important first step: to show people that, when viewed from the outside, the path that the west has gone down doesn't look so obvious and natural.

HistoryExtra
Podcast

"It's not a new discovery to say that nudes prompt male desire – people have known this for centuries"

Hear more of Beard's thoughts on our podcast, now out three times a week

➔ **historyextra.com/podcasts**

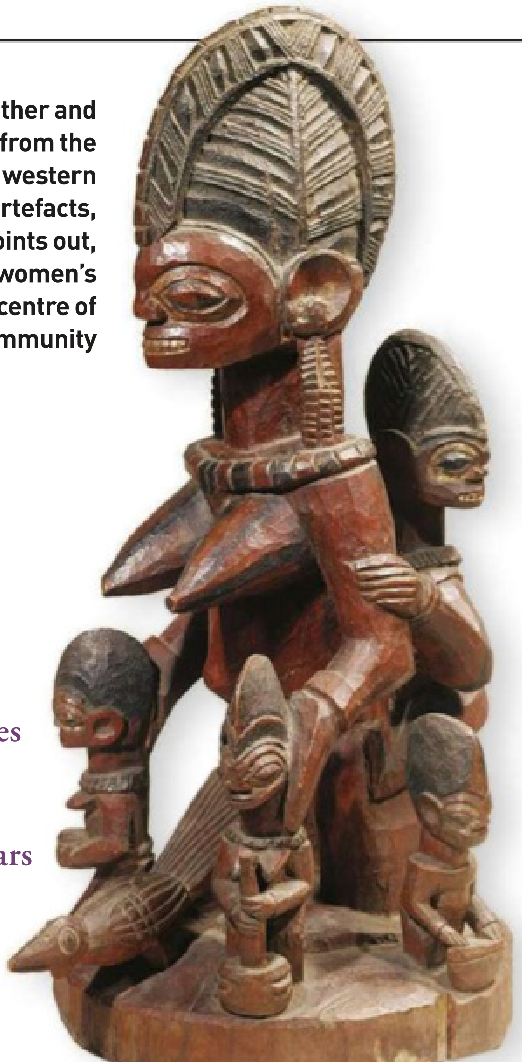
Your documentary also asks how considering the nude might make us understand how we see ourselves as humans more generally. How did you go about exploring that subject?

We wanted to point out that, in the west, we have very strange boundaries about what we think counts as a 'nude', and that there are lots of other naked bodies that we need to put back into the category.

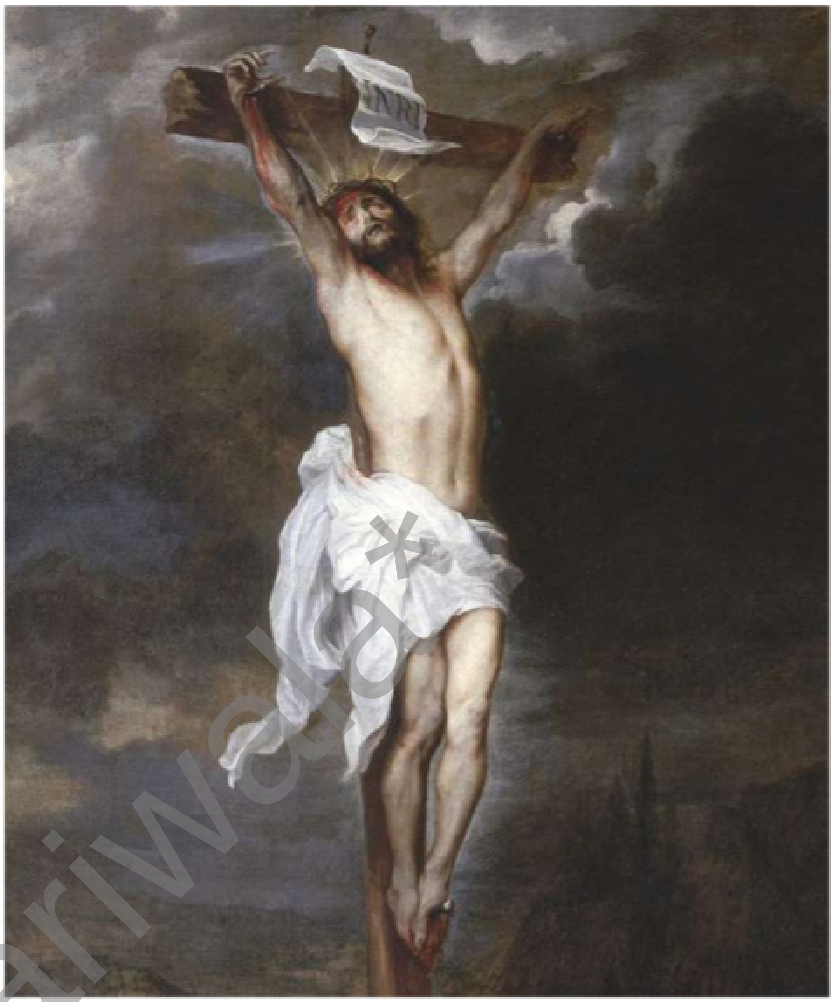
In the documentary, for instance, we explore the body of Jesus. If you think about western urban culture, the place in which you see the most naked bodies outside of the art gallery is the church. The figure of the crucified Jesus, while not absolutely nude, is often effectively naked. But it still seems slightly odd to talk about the 'nude Jesus', so it was interesting to explore why such images haven't become part of that category.

We visited the British Museum with its former director Neil MacGregor to look at some amazing Michelangelo drawings, and he was very clear that the body of Jesus has been crucial and formative in the way in which the west thinks about nakedness and nudity. That's obvious, in a way, because Christianity is a religion whose central paradox is that God made man – and so, in a sense, you have to explore the extent to which Jesus was a man and the extent to which he was a sexual being. There are some extraordinary drawings in which, not put too fine a point on it, there's not much doubt that Jesus has got an erection. That's not smutty; it's an important way of saying that yes, Jesus was a man in every sense.

GETTY IMAGES



A statue of a mother and her children from the Yoruba culture of western Africa. Such artefacts, Mary Beard points out, often celebrate women's roles at the centre of the community



The crucifixion of Jesus as depicted in a 17th-century painting by Flemish artist Anthony van Dyck. "The figure of the crucified Jesus, while not absolutely nude, is often effectively naked – but it still seems slightly odd to talk about the 'nude Jesus'," Beard suggests

BRIDGEMAN/GETTY IMAGES

Some of these anxieties are timeless. Others, however, have been reframed in recent years – due to the #MeToo debate, gender binaries breaking down, and so on. Do you think this is an opportunity for us to reinterpret the nude in light of 21st-century identities?
There is definitely a 21st-century perspective that's worth exploring here. When we were in the planning stages of these programmes, the head of BBC Arts said, very firmly: "I want to know why we're making programmes about the nude now. What's different?" That proved to be a very important interjection, because it made us think a bit harder about the present moment in which binary gender and various forms of sexuality are being increasingly challenged.

All of those developments mean that we are increasingly framing the naked body in very different ways. I thought that, when I'd finished making the documentary, I might end up concluding that the nude has had its day in a gender-fluid, non-binary world. And it's certainly true that most nudes in the mainstream western tradition have been jolly well binary. However, the more we talked about it with people in the trans community, and with people who identify with different versions of gender, the more we found that there was huge enthusiasm not to get rid of the nude but instead to rewrite it and to make it speak differently. So, much to my surprise, I came to think that more radical views about gender may not kill off the nude in art and, instead, might be just what the form needed.

What new ways of seeing, or new questions, would you like people to have as a result of watching the series?
I would like people to recognise the difficulties that they have with this medium and this genre, which we are often encouraged to not really look at. We're encouraged to take the nude somewhat for granted, even though we know it's controversial in all kinds of ways.

I'd also like us to examine what we think we're doing in looking at it. I've got absolutely no interest whatsoever in stopping people looking at nudes. But I want people – and I very much include myself in this – to be a bit more quizzical about what's going on when we do that. Why and how do we let some people look at some things and not others? Why are there fig leaves on some things but not others? What are we saying about ourselves when we decide there are some bodies that we don't feel very happy about looking at?

It'd be great if we could start thinking about all of these questions in terms of our current preoccupations with a 'normalised' body image. There was a recent newspaper report into how good it was to get teenagers to do life drawing, because it allows them to actually see what a real body is like when it hasn't been Photoshopped into perfection. Essentially, if there's one thing I can achieve through this documentary, it's for people to take another look at both the nude and the human body. 🌐

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary Beard is professor of classics at the University of Cambridge. Her BBC Two series *Mary Beard's Shock of the Nude*, is available to view on iPlayer until early March: *bbc.co.uk/iplayer*

"You can't just look at a woman, or a goddess, naked; you have to imagine that you've just surprised her as she was having her bath"

***Mary Beard** talks to art historian and broadcaster **Janina Ramirez** about three key works explored in the series*

Janina Ramirez: I wanted to ask you about three specific artworks that pop up in the series, and why we should be looking at them afresh. I know you've been looking at the first, the *Aphrodite of Knidos* (see page 75), for a long time, and that she's close to your heart. Has the way you've thought about her changed?

Mary Beard: Yeah, I think it has. When I was a young classicist, I thought that the line-up of nudes going back to the *Aphrodite of Knidos* was actually pretty dull. Let's face it, you go into museums in which there are lots of statues lined up against the wall and see, quite understandably, people walking right past them. It took about 20 years for me to see that the statue was really edgy and controversial. That was the first time I realised that things that are 'classic' in every sense of the word can also be dangerous and difficult.

She is naked, in that she has no clothes on, but it's something more than that, isn't it? She conceals yet reveals, doesn't she?

Yes. She's a very naughty sculpture, really, because she looks as if she's being a bit modest – she's got her hands over her breasts and she's got a towel and water pot by her side. But all of that is to give the viewer an excuse to look at her, I think. You can't look at a woman, or a goddess, just like that; you have to imagine that you've just surprised her as she was having her bath.

Art historian, author and presenter Janina Ramirez, who discussed Beard's new series at its launch in London earlier this year

Mary Beard pictured at Laboratori Artistici Nicoli in Carrara, Italy. The studio makes reproductions of classical statues

This is where we start to get into the problem of the female nude in particular, and nude bodies more generally. How complicit are we in the looking? If we think about an artwork such as Courbet's *Origin of the World* (right, below), that is purely a woman's private parts on display. There's no head – it's just the lower body.

I don't think there is ever any good definition of pornography but, if you look at what people say makes something 'pornographic', it's that you have no head, no face, no personality – all you have is genitals. And in every way, on that kind of definition, *Origin of the World* looks like a piece of porn. But it is now treated as art, and even I, to some extent, actually enjoy looking at it. Yet you can see that everyone is terribly careful to remind each other that it is art.

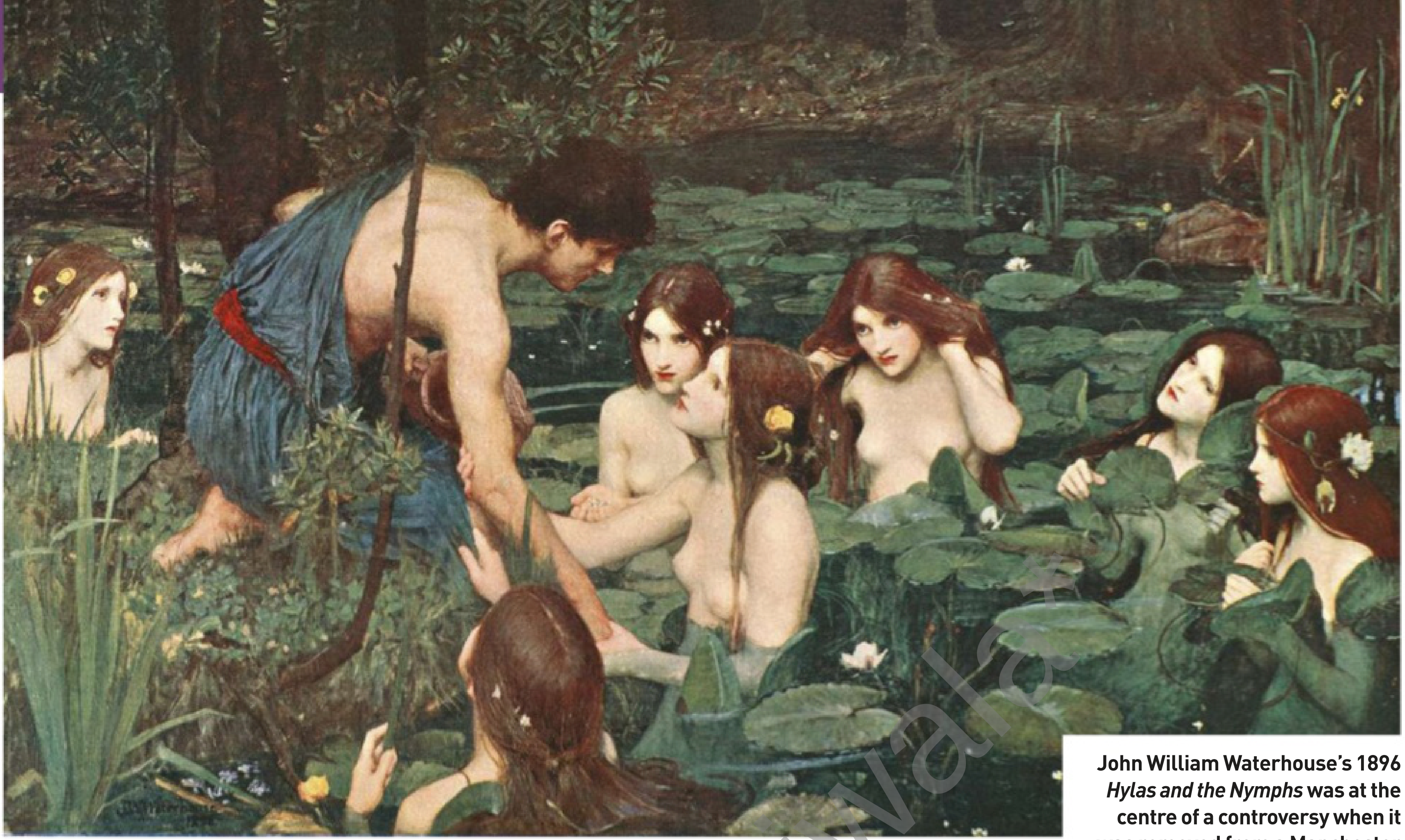
All the talk about the wonderful use of mustard and brush strokes!

The website of the museum where it's displayed [the Musée d'Orsay, Paris] tells you that it's not pornography because of the nice colours – and you can see where they're coming from, but it's desperate. They put it in the kind of gilded frame reserved for masterpieces, not pornography. And we also have no idea who gave it its title…

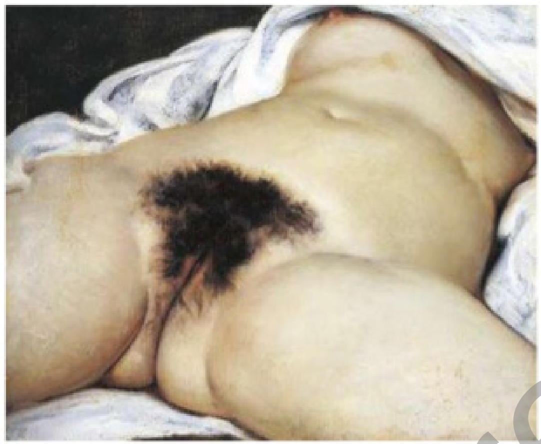
It's such a huge, all-encompassing title, isn't it? And as soon as you title something, you're leading the viewer down a particular route.

Yes, it says women's genitals are mystical.

FRAN MONKS/BBC



John William Waterhouse's 1896 *Hylas and the Nymphs* was at the centre of a controversy when it was removed from a Manchester gallery as part of an 'intervention installation' in 2018



Courbet's 1866 *Origin of the World*. "They put it in the kind of gilded frame reserved for masterpieces, not pornography," says Beard

Absolutely. "All life originates here."
One of the things we explore very briefly in the programme is that, if you try giving it a different title – 'Jeanette's Pussy', for instance – it instantly starts to look a bit different. Even as it is, it's been wonderfully controversial.

There's a wonderful street artist who came and sat in front of it, and then lifted up her skirt to reveal her genitals. The visitors in the room were very amused at this, but the custodians were told to remove her. So, in other words, you had a woman – a real woman – whose genitals you couldn't see as clearly as those in the painting, being removed from the gallery when behind her was a really detailed, super-close-up version.

It was very ironic – and the theme of removal leads me nicely on to my third artwork. In the series, you feature John William Waterhouse's 1896 painting *Hylas and the Nymphs* (above). It's a beautiful pre-Raphaelite painting, gorgeously done, but in 2018 it was controversially removed from display in Manchester Art Gallery. What's the thorny issue behind this?
This is a sad story of complete misrepresentation. It's a pre-Raphaelite painting of a young man who is about to be lured, we assume to his death, by a group of bare-breasted, barely pubescent water nymphs. There was a huge scandal recently when the artist Sonia Boyce performed an 'intervention installation' in which she removed the painting from the gallery. All hell broke out among art critics who should have known better.

"Are we going to be burning books next?" was one of the comments I saw.
Exactly. And actually, Boyce never intended the removal of this painting to be permanent: she intended to make an intervention that made us look harder at the painting. There's something kind of nicely paradoxical that you think harder about something if it's taken down.

And that is, in a way, what happened – but with real fulminations of journalistic outrage. I think what she was trying to say is: "Notice what this picture is of". She wasn't trying to take it down forever, but instead to make people notice what the painting shows: a group of very young women enticing what we suppose to be an innocent man [the femme fatale being a common theme in 19th-century art].

The reaction in the gallery itself was, actually, much more interesting than the often stupid reaction of a lot of the press. Boyce left lots of sticky notes, on which people could write their responses to not seeing their painting, and they were more nuanced than most of the commentary.

It started a discussion, and that's important. Mary, thank you! 🌐

Janina Ramirez is course director for the Undergraduate Certificate in History of Art at the University of Oxford

GETTY IMAGES

Agenda

EXHIBITIONS, TV,
FILMS AND
MORE

PAUL LACHENAUER - THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

XXXXX

SHORE THING

This striking 19th-century *bala* (Mandinka xylophone) is among the highlights of a new exhibition exploring the visual arts of the Sahel, a semiarid region stretching across Africa south of the Sahara, perhaps named by Arab travellers crossing the vast sand sea to its southern shore (*Sahel* may be derived from the Arabic for 'shore'). Over many centuries from AD 300, the western Sahel became an important trade nexus, witnessing the rise of great empires and kingdoms based around the Senegal and Niger rivers. Displays at New York's Met Museum trace the evolution of various art forms across these polities and eras, from simple stone monuments and gold body ornaments to refined sculptures, elaborate textiles and musical instruments, reflecting step changes in those societies including the arrival of Islam.

Sahel: Art and Empires on the Shores of the Sahara, until 10 May at the Met Fifth Avenue, New York City
metmuseum.org/exhibitions

→

THE ART OF EQUALITY

New BBC Radio 4 series *Equal As We Are* explores fiction from the past to find out what it can tell us about modern gender issues. Presenter **Laura Wade** picks five works that highlight key themes

Romantic nostalgia

Le Morte d'Arthur Thomas Malory (1485)

"One thing that really fascinated me was that Malory was writing nostalgically about the way men and women were together in a sort of magical, hundreds-of-years-ago place quite different from the world he was living in at the time. Today, people hark back to 1950s values, for example, and a kind of idealised world – we have a nostalgic view. And that's exactly what people were doing way back in Malory's day as well."

Marital discord

Paradise Lost John Milton (1667)

"Reading about Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost* sparked discussions about changing ideas of marriage: what it's for, the reciprocal obligations of marriage, the idea of the companionship of marriage, how much arguing is the right amount of arguing to have in the relationship – the same kind of marital discord people are dealing with now – and how a relationship deals with the pressure on it from outside."

Banter and friendships

Much Ado About Nothing

William Shakespeare (c1599)

"It was interesting thinking about banter. The idea of 'negging' – needling, pulling someone's pigtails because you actually fancy them – was a way into it. But we also thought about Benedick as someone who's returned from war and is far more comfortable in male company. The idea of coupling up, for someone like that, represents a big breach in their same-sex friendships. That would be a fundamental shift in his experience of life, away from what he's been doing and his comfort zone. It got me thinking about the impact becoming a couple has on your existing same-sex or platonic friendships."

Sexual harassment

Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded

Samuel Richardson (1740)

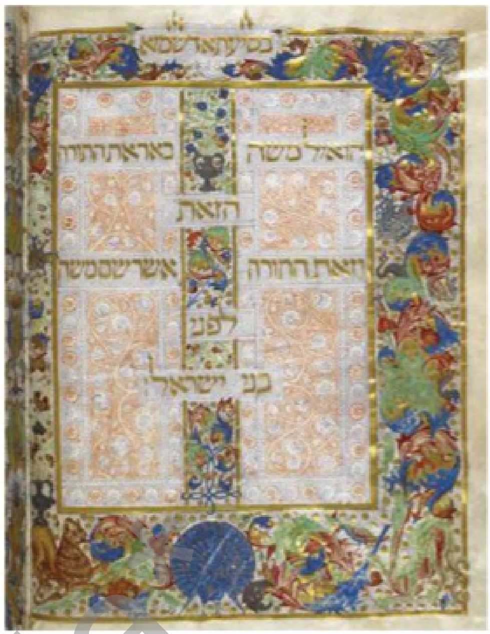
"*Pamela* is about a servant girl whose male employer attempts to seduce her, and is very manipulative in doing so. It speaks of sexual harassment in the workplace, which has been so current in our discourse in the past few years but was just as present in women's lives in the mid-18th century. That relationship was very widely discussed in society at that time, and this book was incredibly popular. So, though those issues feel new, they're not – and even the out-in-the-openness of them isn't as new as we might have thought."

Equality in the bedroom

Riders Jilly Cooper (1985)

"This book led us to talk about whether some couples prefer *less* equality in the bedroom, and whether growing equality has rendered sex between men and women in some way a bit less sexy. Was the idea of a slightly violent but very manly man secretly what women were attracted to? We also discussed the idea that those 'bonkbusters' were essentially escapist – that we are allowed to enjoy them in a way that requires us to forgive their historical shortcomings."

Equal As We Are, presented by Laura Wade and originally broadcast on BBC Radio 4, is now available on BBC Sounds: *bbc.co.uk/sounds*

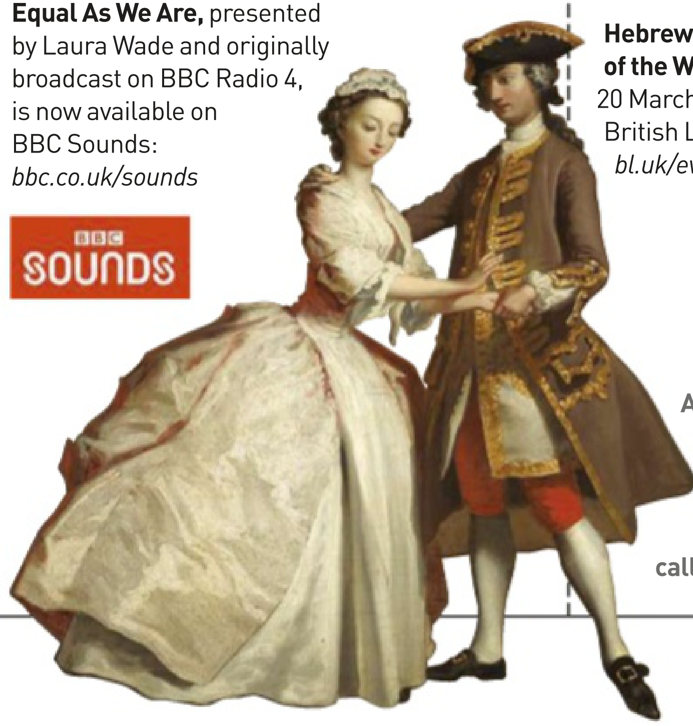


Beautifully painted images of plants and animals illustrate a 1472 manuscript of Maimonides' Mishneh Torah (or Code of Law)

PAPER TRAIL

The diaspora of Jews started with the exile of the Israelites in antiquity, followed by successive waves that spread Jewish culture, knowledge and faith to all corners of the globe. A new exhibition of Hebrew manuscripts at the British Library in London explores the extent to which such knowledge and culture was exchanged between Jewish people and the communities they lived alongside, from Europe and north Africa to the Middle East and China. These documents contain legal and religious advice, information on science and astronomy, and even ideas of alchemy and magic – and reveal the tensions between this itinerant people and the inhabitants of the lands in which they found themselves.

Hebrew Manuscripts: Journeys of the Written Word,
20 March–2 August at the British Library, London
bl.uk/events/hebrew-manuscripts



A painting by Joseph Highmore inspired by *Pamela*. Samuel Richardson's 1740 novel reflected contemporary concerns about what we'd now call workplace harassment

BRIDGEMAN/BRITISH LIBRARY

18+

WHAT IS
AVAXHOME?

Naresh Jariwala

AVAXHOME -

the biggest Internet portal, providing you various content: brand new books, trending movies, fresh magazines, hot games, recent software, latest music releases.

Unlimited satisfaction one low price
Cheap constant access to piping hot media
Protect your downloadings from Big brother
Safer, than torrent-trackers

18 years of seamless operation and our users' satisfaction

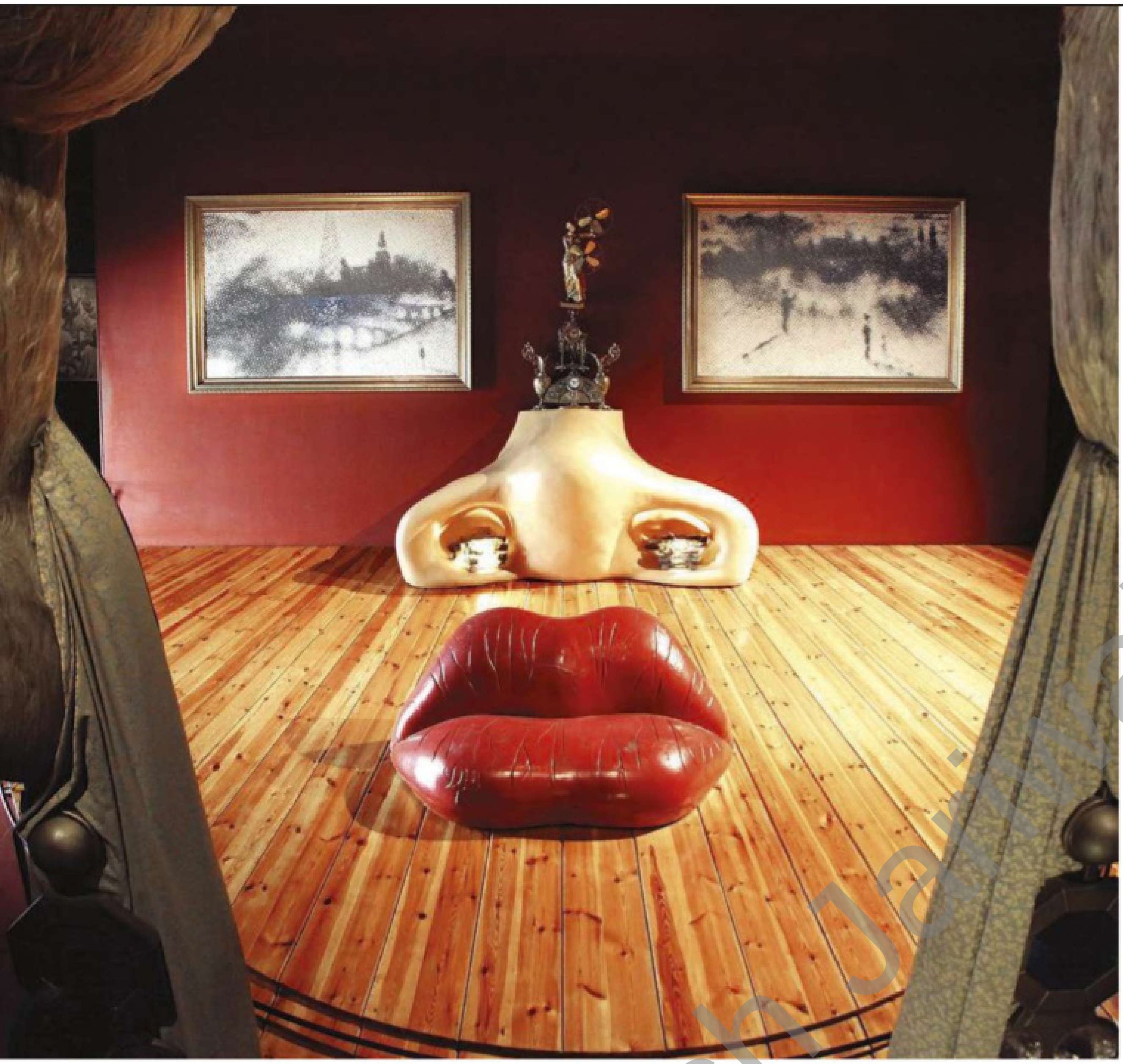
All languages
Brand new content
One site

AVXLIVE.ICU

AvaxHome - Your End Place

We have everything for all of your needs. Just open https://avxlive.icu

Naresh Jariwala



The Mae West Room in the Dalí Theatre-Museum at Figueres, created by Salvador Dalí in 1974. His surreal imagery was part of a movement that subverted concepts of reality in art

ALTERED IMAGES

Today, people across the world take more photos every two minutes than were created in the entire 19th century. Surrounded by still and moving pictures, we produce, consume and are influenced by images in ways unimaginable to previous generations. In a new four-part BBC Four series, James Fox explores how visual culture has evolved from the early 20th century to reflect and shape our lives, from Salvador Dalí's artistic trickery to the ascent of Instagram.

The Age of the Image, BBC Four, scheduled to air in March: *bbc.co.uk/bbcfour*

HARLEM RENAISSANCE MAN

Sportsman, singer, civil rights activist, scapegoat: Paul Robeson played many roles – willingly and otherwise – during his life and long career. Following academic and sporting success, and a short stint as a lawyer, his rapid ascent within the Harlem Renaissance led to a starring role in stage then, later, screen versions of *Showboat*, securing international fame. But Robeson's ideological and political activities, particularly his criticism of US foreign policy and his pro-Soviet stance, antagonised US authorities, leading to McCarthy-era blacklisting. A new BBC Radio 3 series explores the complex life and career of this talented, flawed, intelligent man through five songs from his vast repertoire.

History of Paul Robeson in Five Songs, BBC Radio 3, from 30 March *bbc.co.uk/radio3*

Paul Robeson pictured in 1925, around the time his performing career began to take off

×Naresh Jaiwala×

A new series explores how home movies captured everyday life in Nazi Germany

BBC/ALAMY/GETTY

LIFE UNDER EVIL

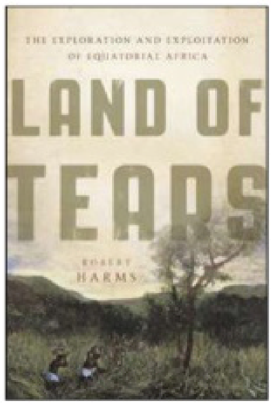
What was everyday life like for ordinary Germans during Nazi rule? Depictions in films, books and TV series show only selected fragments of the reality, but recently discovered home movies expose the minutiae of existence, as well as attitudes to the regime, the war and antisemitism. Edited into a short BBC Four TV series, diverse footage covers both domestic life and military developments during the conflict, with a cast of characters telling sometimes dramatic, often touching and always revealing stories.

Lost Home Movies of Nazi Germany, available to watch on BBC iPlayer: *bbc.co.uk/iplayer*

→

Nine books for spring

Charting the rise and fall of nations, empires and cultural movements, this season's top books offer suitably epic takes on key moments in history

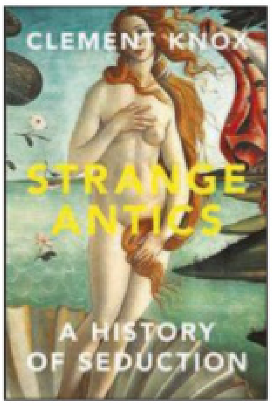

THE EXPLORATION AND EXPLOITATION OF EQUATORIAL AFRICA
LAND OF TEARS
ROBERT HARMS

Land of Tears: The Exploration and Exploitation of Equatorial Africa

by Robert Harms

Basic Books, out now

Starting in the late 19th century, the full force of global demand for resources – ivory, rubber, enslaved people – was brought to bear upon the communities of the Congo Basin. This sobering book documents the devastation wreaked as this demand was met here.

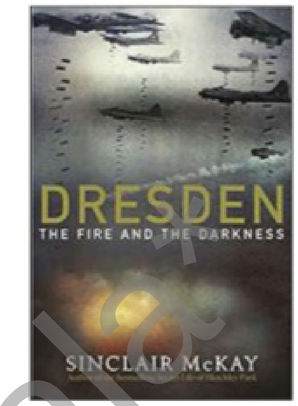

CLEMENT KNOX
STRANGE ANTICS
A HISTORY OF SEDUCTION

Strange Antics: A History of Seduction

by Clement Knox

William Collins, out now

Have 21st-century developments such as online dating and the #MeToo movement forever altered the politics of seduction? This history of desire and courtship puts things in perspective, roaming from the Garden of Eden to Jupiter's moons in its bid to understand the pursuit of intimacy.

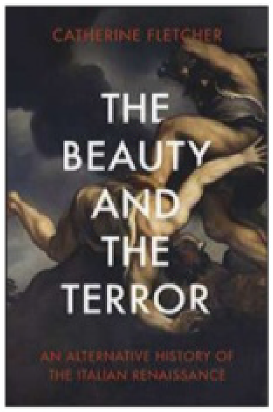

DRESDEN
THE FIRE AND THE DARKNESS
SINCLAIR McKAY

Dresden: The Fire and the Darkness

by Sinclair McKay

Viking, out now

Seventy-five years ago, in the Second World War, the Allies unleashed a ferocious bombing campaign on the German city of Dresden, killing an estimated 25,000 people. This account draws on previously untapped sources to chronicle the horror of the events of February 1945 as experienced by people on the ground.

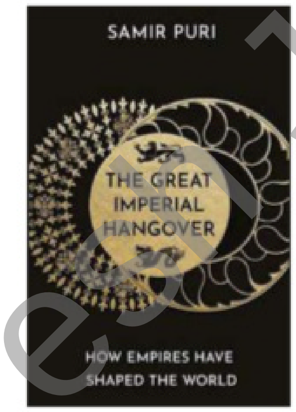

CATHERINE FLETCHER
THE BEAUTY AND THE TERROR
AN ALTERNATIVE HISTORY OF THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

The Beauty and the Terror

by Catherine Fletcher

Bodley Head, March

Think you know all there is to know about the Italian Renaissance? Think again. That's the message at the heart of Catherine Fletcher's new history of the period, which both complicates the familiar narrative and reintroduces figures often left out of its telling.

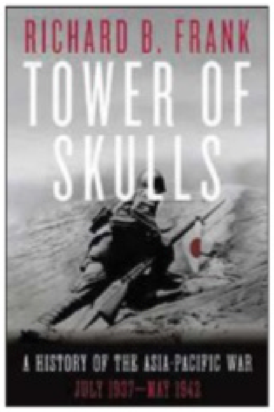

SAMIR PURI
THE GREAT IMPERIAL HANGOVER
HOW EMPIRES HAVE SHAPED THE WORLD

The Great Imperial Hangover

by Samir Puri

Atlantic, April

We may live in a world without empires as they were once known, but their influence is still felt. Here, international relations expert Samir Puri looks at the ways in which the imperial past informs the present, from India and Russia to the United States.

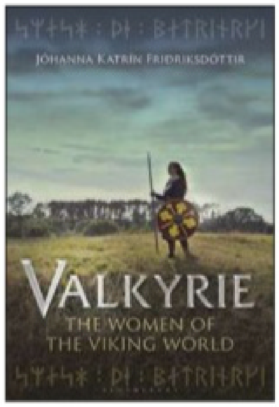

RICHARD B. FRANK
TOWER OF SKULLS
A HISTORY OF THE ASIA-PACIFIC WAR
JULY 1937–MAY 1942

Tower of Skulls: A History of the Asia-Pacific War, Volume One

by Richard B Frank

WW Norton, April

This weighty book – first of a trilogy – examines how the Second World War played out in China, Singapore, the Philippines and Burma. Spanning military, social and political spheres, it's a valuable corrective to western-skewed accounts.

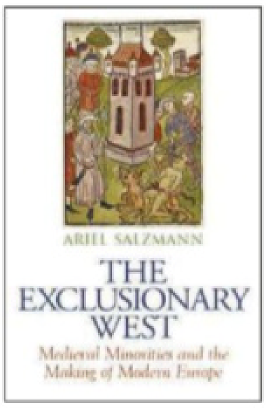

JÓHANNA KATRÍN FRIÐRIKSDÓTTIR
VALKYRIE
THE WOMEN OF THE VIKING WORLD

Valkyrie: The Women of the Viking World

by Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir

Bloomsbury, April

Named after the female figures of Norse mythology who were believed to decide who died in battle, this look at the role of women in Viking culture is set very much in the real world of medieval Iceland. A specialist in literature and manuscripts, Friðriksdóttir's work draws on the latest research.


ARIEL SALZMANN
THE EXCLUSIONARY WEST
Medieval Minorities and the Making of Modern Europe

The Exclusionary West: Medieval Minorities and the Making of Modern Europe

by Ariel Salzmann

Hurst, June

Following the roots of present-day anti-Semitism and Islamaphobia back to the medieval world and beyond, this scholarly book investigates how ideas of exclusion and identity became intrinsically bound up with the foundation of the nation state.

ROYALS AND REBELS
THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SIKH EMPIRE
PRIYA ATWAL

Royals and Rebels: The Rise and Fall of the Sikh Empire

by Priya Atwal

Hurst, June

Among the figures nominated in last issue's poll of the greatest leader in world history, Sikh ruler Ranjit Singh presided over an empire of prosperity and tolerance. The factors behind his success, and the ways in which his kingdom altered India forever, are considered in this insightful new volume. 🌐

WORDS **PAUL BLOOMFIELD & MATT ELTON**

BBC World Histories

CONTACT US
Email worldhistories@historyextra.com
Post BBC World Histories, Immediate Media Company Bristol Ltd, Eagle House, Colston Avenue, Bristol BS1 4ST, UK **Phone** +44 117 314 7377
Twitter twitter.com/historyextra **Facebook** facebook.com/historyextra
Website historyextra.com/worldhistories

Issue 21 – March/April 2020
BBC World Histories is published by Immediate Media Company Bristol Limited under licence from BBC Studios who help fund new BBC programmes.

EDITORIAL
Editor Matt Elton +44 117 300 8645
matt.elton@immediate.co.uk
Group editor Rob Attar
Group art editor Susanne Frank
Senior deputy art editor Rachel Dickens
Deputy art editor Rosemary Smith
Art editor, special editions Sarah Lambert
Group production editor Spencer Mizen
Section editors Ellie Cawthorne, Jon Bauckham
Picture editor Samantha Nott
Deputy picture editor Katherine Mitchell
Digital editor Emma Mason
Deputy digital editor Elinor Evans
Digital editorial assistant Rachel Dinning
Podcast producer Ben Youatt
Podcast assistant Jack Bateman

CONTRIBUTORS
Mary Beard, Paul Bloomfield, Davide Bonazzi, Michael Booth, Jerry Brotton, John Connelly, David Edmonds, Johan Franzén, Mike Fu, Jon Gertner, Theresa Grieben, Jen Manion, Susan Mattern, Richard Overy, Janina Ramirez, Megan Reddi, David Reynolds, Angel Smith, Camilla Townsend, Laura Wade

THANKS TO
Robert Blackmore, Chris Burroughs, Jonny Coward, Fay Glinister, Joanna Hawkins, Josette Reeves, Everett Sharp, Sue Wingrove

MARKETING & PRODUCTION
Subscriptions director
Jacky Perales-Morris
Subscriptions marketing manager
Natalie Lawrence
US representative Kate Buckley
buckley@buckleypell.com
Production co-ordinator
Emily Mounter
Reprographics Tony Hunt and Chris Sutch
Advertising manager Sam Jones
+44 117 300 8145 *sam.jones@immediate.co.uk*

IMMEDIATE MEDIA COMPANY
Content director David Musgrove
Commercial director Jemima Dixon
Publishing director Andy Healy
Managing director Andy Marshall
CEO Tom Bureau

SYNDICATION
Director of licensing & syndication
Tim Hudson
International partners' manager
Anna Brown

BBC STUDIOS, UK PUBLISHING
Chair, Editorial Review Boards
Nicholas Brett
Managing Director, Consumer Products and Licensing Stephen Davies
Head of publishing Mandy Thwaites
Compliance manager Cameron McEwan
UK publishing co-ordinator Eva Abramik
uk.publishing@bbc.com
bbcstudios.com

IMMEDIATE MEDIA Co

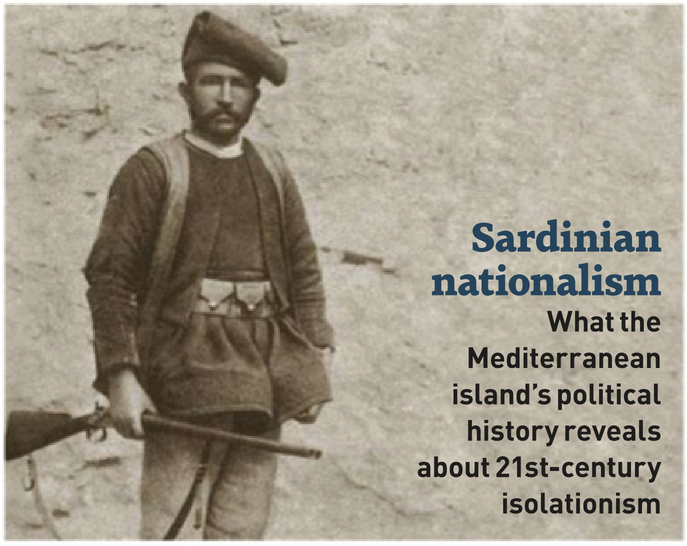
© Immediate Media Company Bristol Limited, 2020 – ISSN: 1469 8552. Not for resale. All rights reserved. Unauthorised reproduction in whole or part is prohibited without written permission. Every effort has been made to secure permission for copyright material. In the event of any material being used inadvertently, or where it proved impossible to trace the copyright owner, acknowledgement will be made in a future issue.
MSS, photographs and artwork are accepted on the basis that *BBC World Histories* and its agents do not accept liability for loss or damage to same. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the publisher. We abide by IPSO's rules and regulations. To give feedback about our magazines, please visit immediate.co.uk, email *editorialcomplaints@immediate.co.uk* or write to Katherine Conlon, Immediate Media Co., Vineyard House, 44 Brook Green, London W6 7BT, United Kingdom.

recycle
When you have finished with this magazine please recycle it.

ipso. Regulated

Coming up in issue 22 on sale from 23 April 2020

The Californian century
How the US state led decades of cultural and technological progress



Sardinian nationalism
What the Mediterranean island's political history reveals about 21st-century isolationism

British nuclear testing
The harrowing stories of servicemen who witnessed atomic experiments in the 1950s

Never miss an issue – turn to page 46 to **subscribe today**

BRIDGEMAN/AKG IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

Journeys

Stories and sights from global history

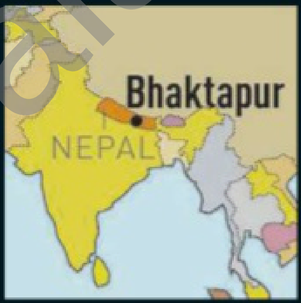
Wonders of the World

Bhaktapur Nepal

ALAMY

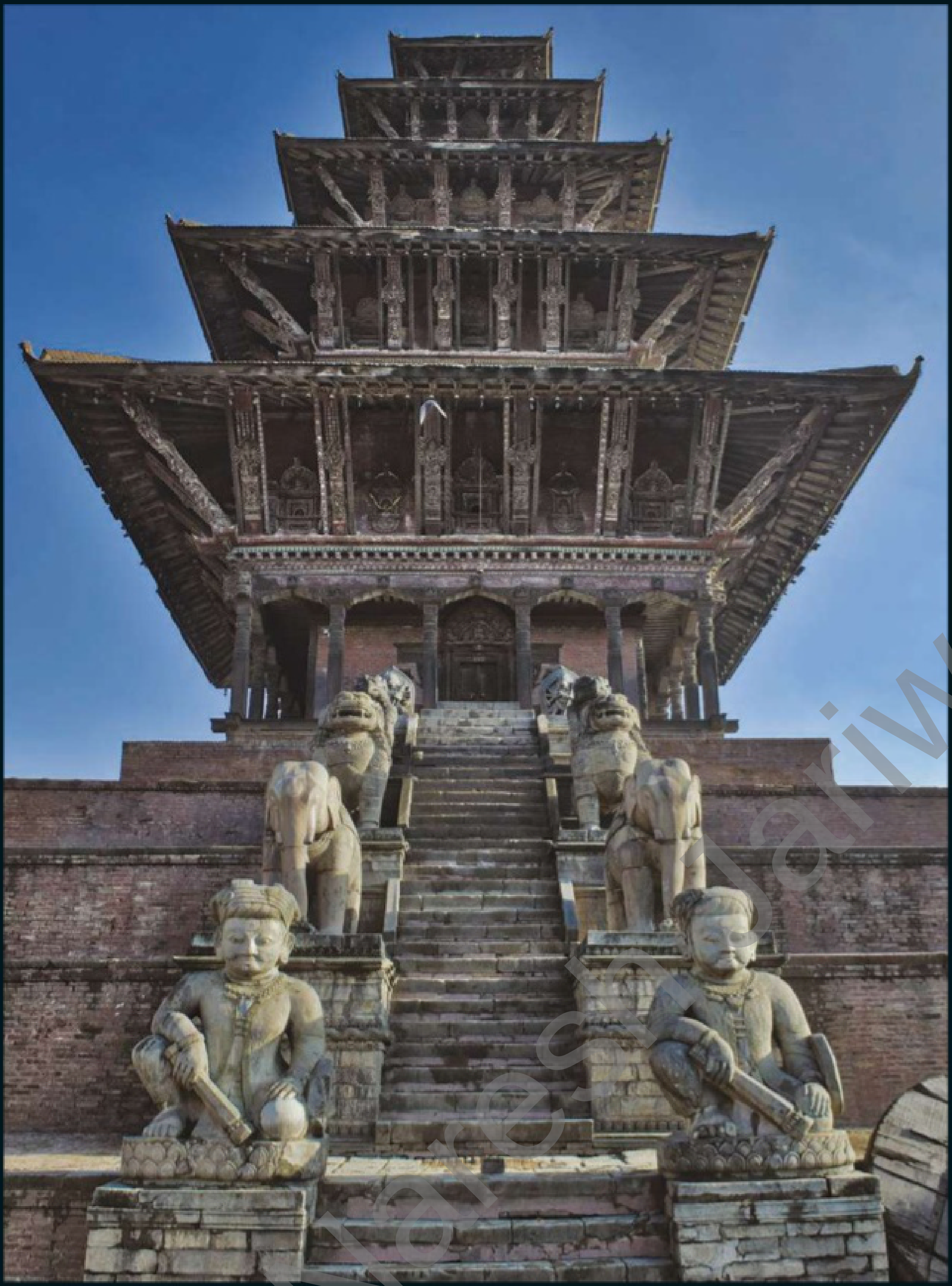
Window seat of power

The intricately carved wooden frames of the 55 Window Palace gaze out over Bhaktapur's Durbar (Palace) Square to the elegant 17th-century Siddhi Laxmi Temple (centre), recently restored after its destruction by the devastating 2015 earthquake. The city was founded in the 12th or 13th century (some say earlier) by King Ananda Malla, launching a dynasty that dominated the Kathmandu valley for five and a half centuries. King Yaksha Malla built many of the city's best-known structures in the 15th century, but Bhaktapur reached its architectural apogee under Bhupatindra Malla (r1696–1722), with the construction of such edifices as the 55 Window Palace.



Nepal's medieval masterpiece

Despite a series of destructive earthquakes, Bhaktapur retains a peerless collection of palaces and temples. **Paul Bloomfield** visits the showpieces of the South Asian city →

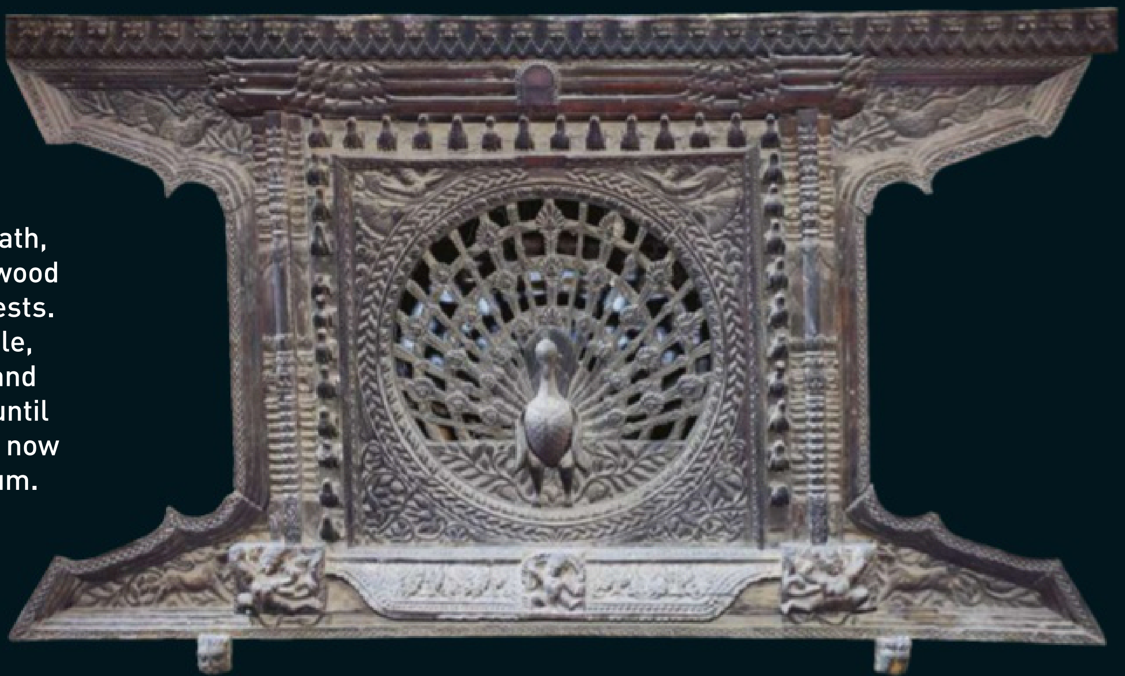


Grappling guardians

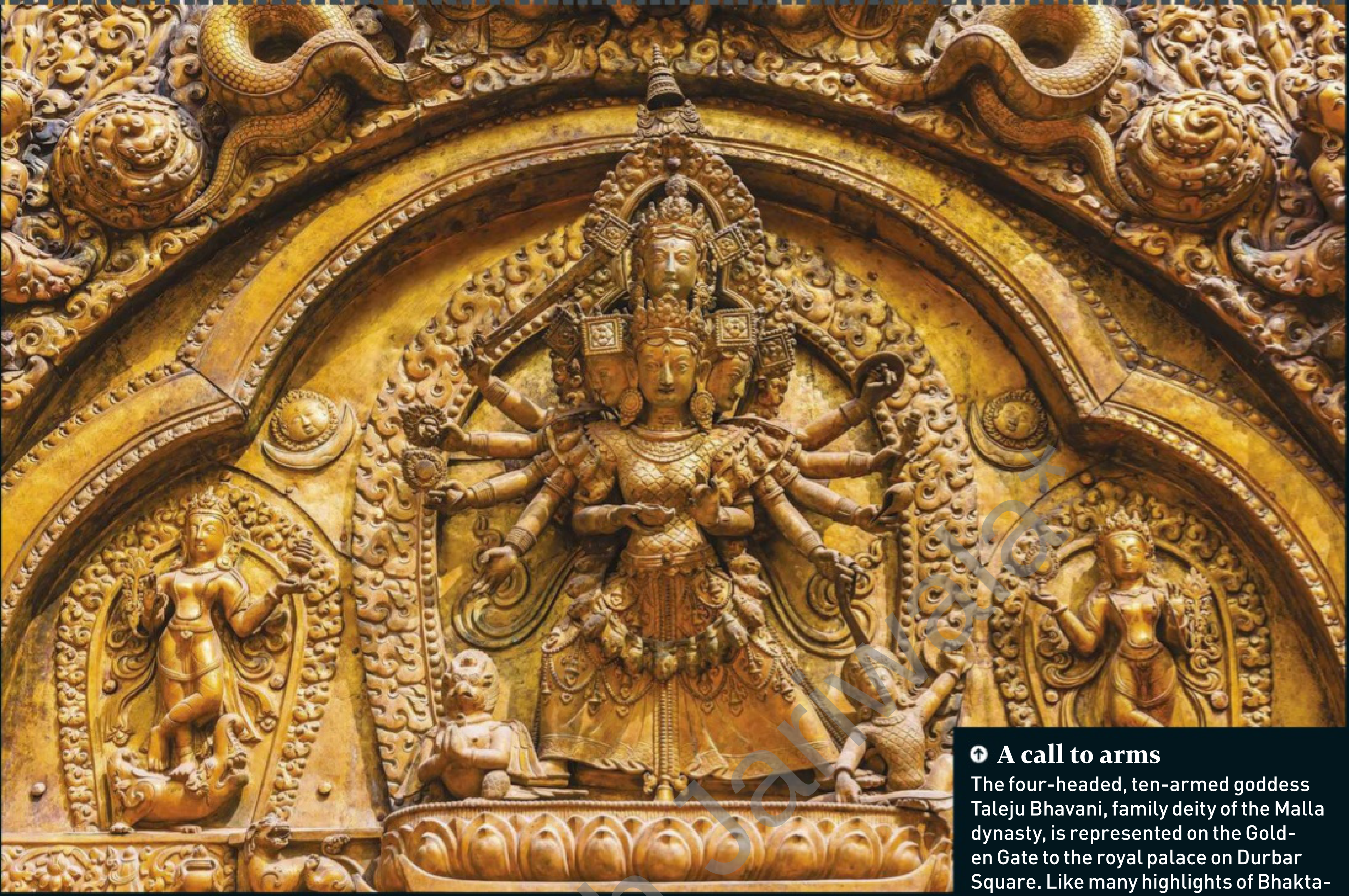
The steps up to the 30-metre-high five-roofed Nyatapola Temple are guarded by twin phalanxes of animals and deities, fronted by the legendary Rajput wrestlers Jayamel and Phattu wielding hefty maces. This most imposing of the city's temples, reputedly the tallest in Nepal, was built in 1702 under Bhupatindra Malla. Its construction is so sturdy that it survived both the 2015 and earlier 1934 quakes virtually intact. It's dedicated to a particularly bloodthirsty incarnation of the goddess Durga; only priests are permitted to enter the inner sanctum housing the idol depicting the deity.

Feathered finery

The ornately carved 15th-century Peacock Window adorns the Pujari Math, best-known of a series of brick-and-wood buildings that once housed Hindu priests. These *math* stand behind Tachupal Tole, Bhaktapur's original central square and official seat of the kingdom's royalty until the late 16th century. The Pujari Math now houses the city's Woodcarving Museum.

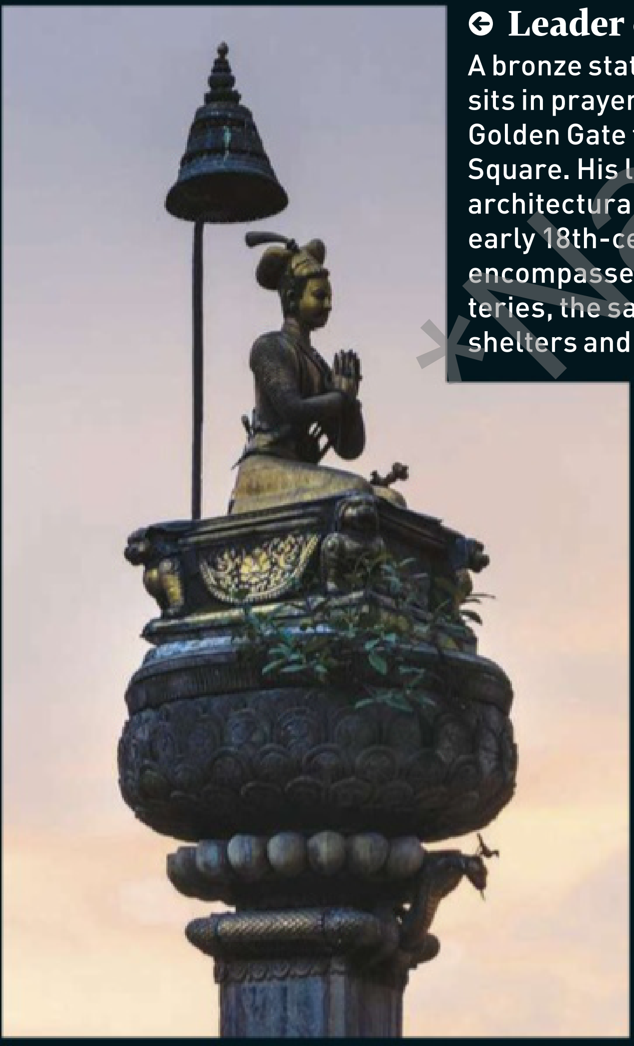


THIS PAGE: GETTY IMAGES/ROBERT HARDING FACING PAGE: ALAMY/ROBERT HARDING/GETTY IMAGES



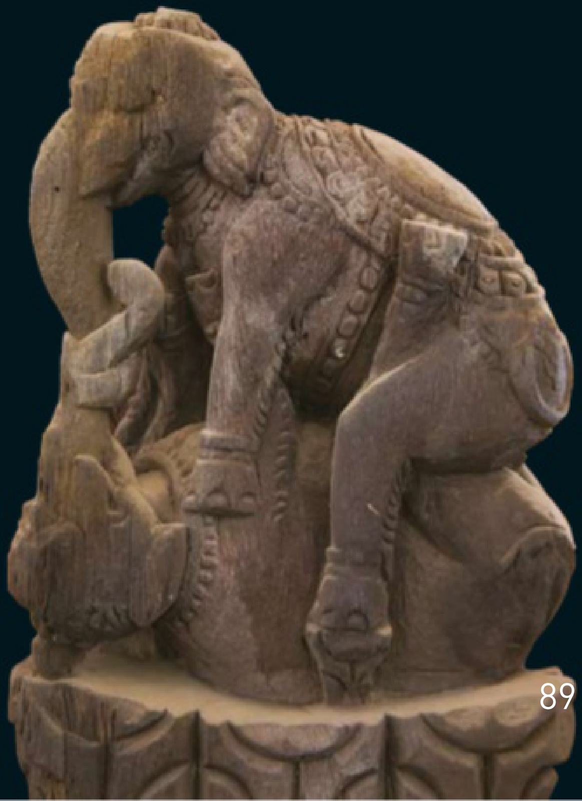
A call to arms

The four-headed, ten-armed goddess Taleju Bhavani, family deity of the Malla dynasty, is represented on the Golden Gate to the royal palace on Durbar Square. Like many highlights of Bhaktapur, construction of the gate began during the reign of Bhupatindra Malla and was completed by his successor, Ranajit Malla (r1722–69), last king in that dynasty. Towards the end of Ranajit's reign, the Kathmandu valley was invaded by Gorkha king Prithvi Narayan Shah, who then took control of the whole of Nepal.



Leader column

A bronze statue of Bhupatindra Malla sits in prayer on a column facing the Golden Gate to the palace on Durbar Square. His legacy was a city rich in architectural beauty; it's said that, in its early 18th-century pomp, Bhaktapur encompassed 172 temples and monasteries, the same number of pilgrim shelters and some 152 wells.



Animal attraction

A pair of amorous pachyderms are depicted in a carving on the Shiva-Parvati Temple commonly known as the Erotic Elephants temple, near Durbar Square. A number of Hindu temples in India and Nepal feature erotic motifs; it's been suggested that these relate to the role of Parvati, consort of the great deity Shiva, as goddess of love and fertility.

Paul Bloomfield is a travel and heritage writer and photographer

Naresh Jarwal

In the footsteps of… Nansen's traverse of the Greenland Ice Sheet

Jon Gertner tracks the 19th-century Norwegian polar pioneer's snowshoe prints across the vast white wilderness of the world's largest island

The vast sheet of ice cladding central Greenland spans some 660,000 square miles and is riven with treacherous crevasses. Crossing this icy mass was the long-held ambition of Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen

ALAMY

→

On 17 July 1888, the young Norwegian scientist Fridtjof Nansen disembarked with five other men from the *Jason*, a seal-hunting ship, 10 miles from Greenland's south-eastern coast. Boarding two small boats, the men began rowing through ice-choked waters toward land. Their goal, when they reached the shore, was to cross the ice sheet that cloaks much of Greenland. This remnant of ancient ice ages covers an expanse of 660,000 square miles and rises, in its centre, to an altitude of nearly two miles.

If Nansen's expedition succeeded, he and his compatriots would become the first to cross the Greenland Ice Sheet. Since the early 18th century, explorers had made modest forays onto the 'inland ice' by foot, but all had turned back before completing the crossing, having encountered punishing cold and deadly crevasses.

Nansen believed he had devised a plan that could succeed where others had not. Once established on the shore, he and his colleagues intended to climb up the island's rocky coast and onto the eastern edge of the island's ice sheet. From there they would set out for the west, pulling sleds designed by Nansen that were laden with enough food and equipment to sustain the party for several months.

Because, despite its name, the ice sheet is a dome rather than a flat expanse, the expedition brought snowshoes (to climb the ice sheet's eastern slope) and skis (to descend down the western side). By Nansen's initial calculations, even at the narrower southern end of Greenland, this traverse would cover some 420 miles.

He knew there would be risks and enduring hardships. Though some explorers had hypothesised that a temperate oasis existed in the centre of the ice sheet, Nansen suspected – correctly, it turned out – that the interior was an unbroken swathe of ice and brutal cold. Therefore his strategy included an inbuilt incentive. The east coast of Greenland was beset by horrific weather and was mostly empty, with the exception of a few small native Inuit settlements. The west coast, however, had Danish villages and commercial harbours, and held the allure of a return passage home.

An expedition dropped off on the east side of Greenland would thus have every reason to strive to cross the ice sheet, simply in order to survive. And so, as they began, Nansen's team adopted a chest-thumping motto: "Death, or the west coast of Greenland."

Carried by currents

Rowing from the *Jason* to Greenland's eastern shore proved far more difficult than Nansen had envisioned. He originally intended to land quickly near a coastal inlet called Sermilikfjord, but the expedition encountered tightly packed sea ice, and the men were forced to drag their boats over and around to find open water.

Then, when they got back to rowing, a strong current began to pull them away from the shore and eastward toward rougher waters. After a couple of days, in fact, they were twice as far from the shore – about 20 miles – as they had been when they had left the *Jason*. In a roiling sea, the men pulled their boats and gear onto a large ice floe for safety. →

> **As they began their mission, Nansen's team adopted a chest-thumping motto: "Death, or the west coast of Greenland"**

ALAMY

Fridtjof Nansen: Explorer, scientist, writer, humanitarian

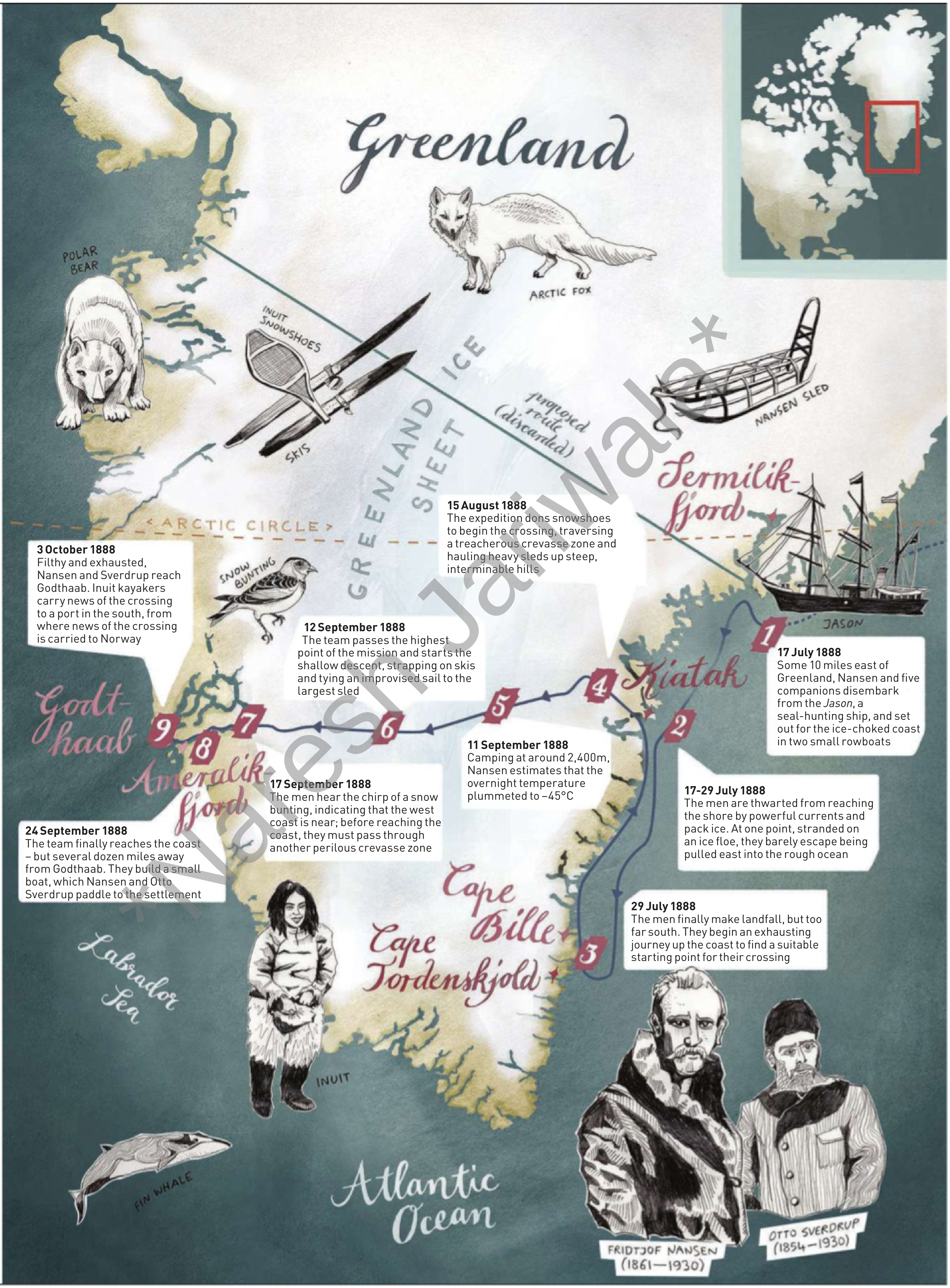
Fridtjof Nansen (1861–1930) was born near Christiania (now Oslo), Norway. His early life was characterised by a love of winter sports – skiing and skating especially – and a fearless determination. From a young age, he aimed to become **the first man to cross the Greenland Ice Sheet**, which he accomplished in 1888, the same year he received a PhD in zoology.

Nansen wrote a **popular account of his Greenland trek** in two volumes fusing adventure, science and memoir. As he would write of his travels: "I found [there] the **great adventure of the ice, deep and pure as infinity**, the silent, starry night, the depths of Nature herself."

His fascination with northern latitudes led him to launch the daring *Fram* expedition five years later, in 1893. **His goal was to reach the North Pole** by allowing a sturdy ship, provisioned for a five-year mission, to become trapped in the sea-ice gyre swirling around the top of the Arctic Ocean. Eventually leaving the *Fram* and travelling on foot, **Nansen trekked further north than any explorer** had before, but failed to reach the pole. Rescued from a remote island, he returned to a hero's welcome in Norway three years after his departure. The *Fram* also returned safely, carrying a wealth of detailed scientific observations on the Arctic region.

Nansen moved into politics and diplomacy before **working for the League of Nations**, helping with the repatriation of First World War prisoners in 1920, with efforts to alleviate famine in Russia, and with displaced Armenians. In 1922 he was **awarded the Nobel Peace Prize**.

Nansen later said: "**Most people are satisfied too soon**, and that is the reason why there is so little wisdom in the world." He died of a heart attack on 13 May 1930.


Greenland
POLAR BEAR
INUIT SNOWSHOES
SKIS
ARCTIC FOX
GREENLAND ICE SHEET
proposed route (discarded)
NANSEN SLED
Sermilik-fjord
< ARCTIC CIRCLE >
SNOW BUNTING
JASON
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
Kiatak
Godt-haab
Ameralik fjord
Cape Bille
Cape Tordenskjold
Labrador Sea
INUIT
FIN WHALE
Atlantic Ocean
FRIDTJOF NANSEN (1861—1930)
OTTO SVERDRUP (1854—1930)

17 July 1888
Some 10 miles east of Greenland, Nansen and five companions disembark from the *Jason*, a seal-hunting ship, and set out for the ice-choked coast in two small rowboats

17-29 July 1888
The men are thwarted from reaching the shore by powerful currents and pack ice. At one point, stranded on an ice floe, they barely escape being pulled east into the rough ocean

29 July 1888
The men finally make landfall, but too far south. They begin an exhausting journey up the coast to find a suitable starting point for their crossing

15 August 1888
The expedition dons snowshoes to begin the crossing, traversing a treacherous crevasse zone and hauling heavy sleds up steep, interminable hills

11 September 1888
Camping at around 2,400m, Nansen estimates that the overnight temperature plummeted to –45°C

12 September 1888
The team passes the highest point of the mission and starts the shallow descent, strapping on skis and tying an improvised sail to the largest sled

17 September 1888
The men hear the chirp of a snow bunting, indicating that the west coast is near; before reaching the coast, they must pass through another perilous crevasse zone

24 September 1888
The team finally reaches the coast – but several dozen miles away from Godthaab. They build a small boat, which Nansen and Otto Sverdrup paddle to the settlement

3 October 1888
Filthy and exhausted, Nansen and Sverdrup reach Godthaab. Inuit kayakers carry news of the crossing to a port in the south, from where news of the crossing is carried to Norway

ILLUSTRATION BY **THERESA GRIEBEN**

→

Nansen realised that the situation was becoming dire: if the men were pulled even farther out into the north Atlantic, they would not only lose their chance to cross Greenland's ice but might even perish in the rough surf. "The breakers seem to be drawing nearer; their roar grows louder," Nansen noted in his journal. "The situation promises before long to be critical."

By luck, in the middle of that night the currents turned, and the following day the expedition could resume rowing toward the shore. Finally, after 12 days at sea, Nansen and his colleagues landed on a beach on Greenland's eastern shore, just north of Cape Tordenskjold.

The extended time at sea, and diversions forced by the ice floes, had landed them much farther south than they had planned, however, so they began working their way north up the frozen coast by boat – a plodding, tiring effort that was brightened only by friendly encounters with native Inuit kayakers and a stay at an Inuit encampment at Cape Bille.

About a week later, they reached a point from where Nansen could see that the inland ice would be easily accessible from the coastal rocks. On 11 August, near a small mountain named Kiatak, he decided to stop rowing north, make a final camp on the shore, and ready his team for their journey west across the ice. Four days later, they departed inland.

On the coasts, Greenland's calving glaciers can drop an iceberg and trigger a massive wave that can swamp a boat and drown its people without warning – a concern that had kept Nansen and his men in a constant state of worry as they rowed up the coast past icy tongues protruding from these thick frozen rivers. As the team journeyed into the inland ice, however, Nansen discovered the perils of crevasses – deep cracks formed as the massive ice sheet, pulled by gravity, flows over bumps and hills, causing strains that split the ice.

Greenland's calving glaciers can drop an iceberg and trigger a massive wave that can swamp a boat and drown its people without warning

What makes crevasses particularly hazardous is that they are sometimes obscured by fresh snow. As Nansen moved up the eastern slope of the ice, his team encountered many narrow fissures that could be forded with a stride or a jump, but others were hidden from sight, leading the men to plunge up to their armpits, their legs dangling over an abyss. Other cracks were easy to spot but too wide to jump across.

For that reason, the expedition's route up onto the ice sheet was not a straight line. They were forced to zig and zag around hazards until they reached a smoother, safer surface at a higher altitude.

Violent storms

The team faced other problems, too. Several times in late August the men were confined to their tent by violent storms lasting for days. But even on days of fair weather when they could move forward, they were beset by a thirst that seemed unquenchable. Originally, Nansen proposed that each man should fill a flask of snow each morning, allowing the heat from their bodies to melt it into drinking water. Yet this wasn't nearly enough to hydrate the men, and their thirst persisted all day, every day. To frequently stop and use a cooking stove to melt snow was considered by Nansen to be impractical. Time was precious. They had to keep moving across the ice sheet before colder weather set in.

The men subsisted on pea soup, biscuits, hot chocolate and canned pemmican, a calorie-rich concoction of dried meat, berries and suet. But the arduous trek left them in a constant state of hunger, exacerbated by the heavy burden of their sleds. Packed with food and gear, the sleds' weight – each at least 100kg – made them extraordinarily difficult to pull up the slope. The ropes with which they hauled the sleds burned into the men's shoulders. Nansen felt that the task was akin to hauling dead weight through sand.

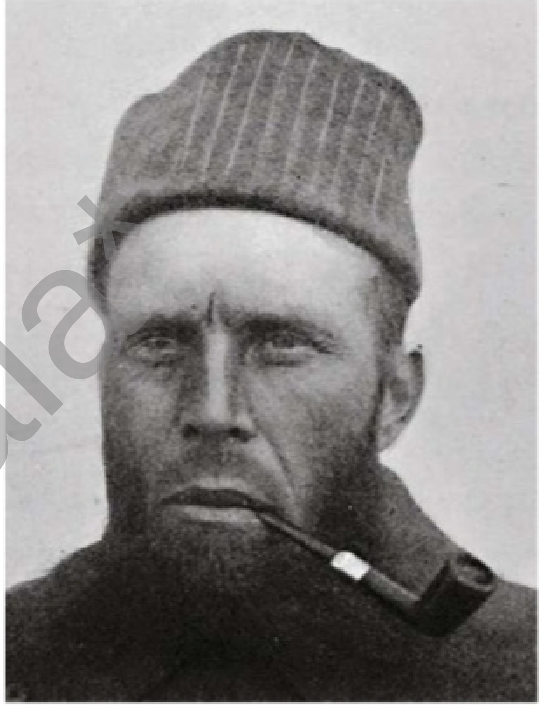
At the end of August, having reached an altitude of 1,800m, Nansen announced that the expedition would take a shorter route across the ice so that they would arrive at a town farther south on the west coast than originally intended. Their delays and the threat of colder weather had led him to think that it would be folly to pursue a longer course. The revised destination was Godthaab (now called Nuuk, Greenland's capital), shaving a distance of nearly 100 miles off their journey. The rest of the party, in a state of near-exhaustion, cheered the news. "They seemed to have already had more than enough of the inland ice," Nansen noted.

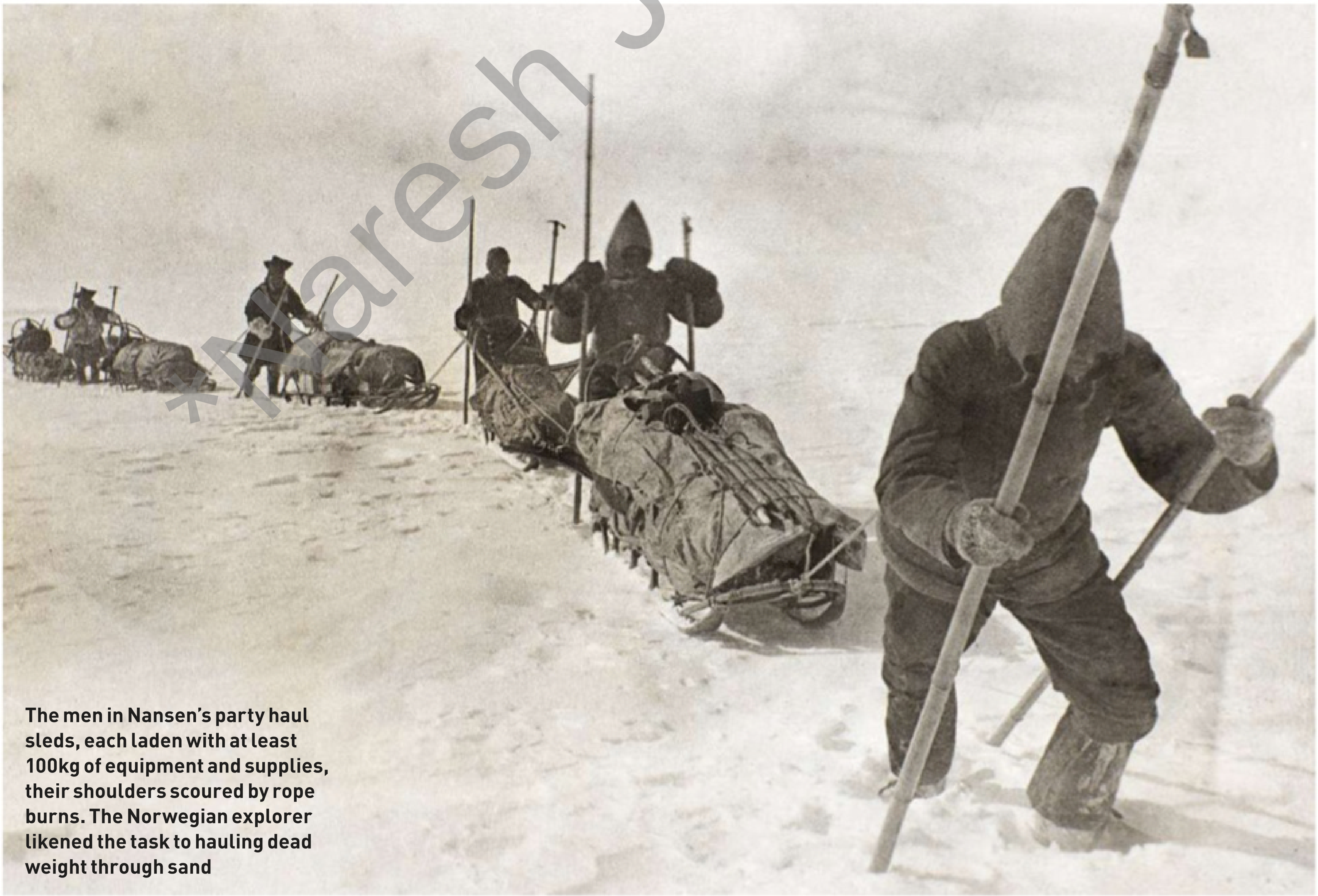
On 2 September, the team discerned an encouraging sign: the ice beneath their feet had begun to level out, and they were able to don their skis. What followed were days of satisfying progress interspersed with nights of bitter cold and snowstorms, sometimes leaving them tent-bound.

Huddled in reindeer sleeping bags, the men passed time by sleeping or reading books. In the evenings, temperatures usually dropped to around –20°C to –30°C. On 11 September, though, Nansen noted that the thermometer he kept under his pillow at night measured –35°F (–37°C) – but that was the lower limit of the instrument's measurement scale; he surmised that the mercury

Deep shafts and cracks form in the ice sheet, creating hazards that are often blocked from view by snow – among the hidden perils faced by Nansen and his team as they tramped and skied across the frozen surface

Expedition member Otto Sverdrup, whose maritime expertise was invaluable in the construction of a boat to reach Godthaab at the end of the mission



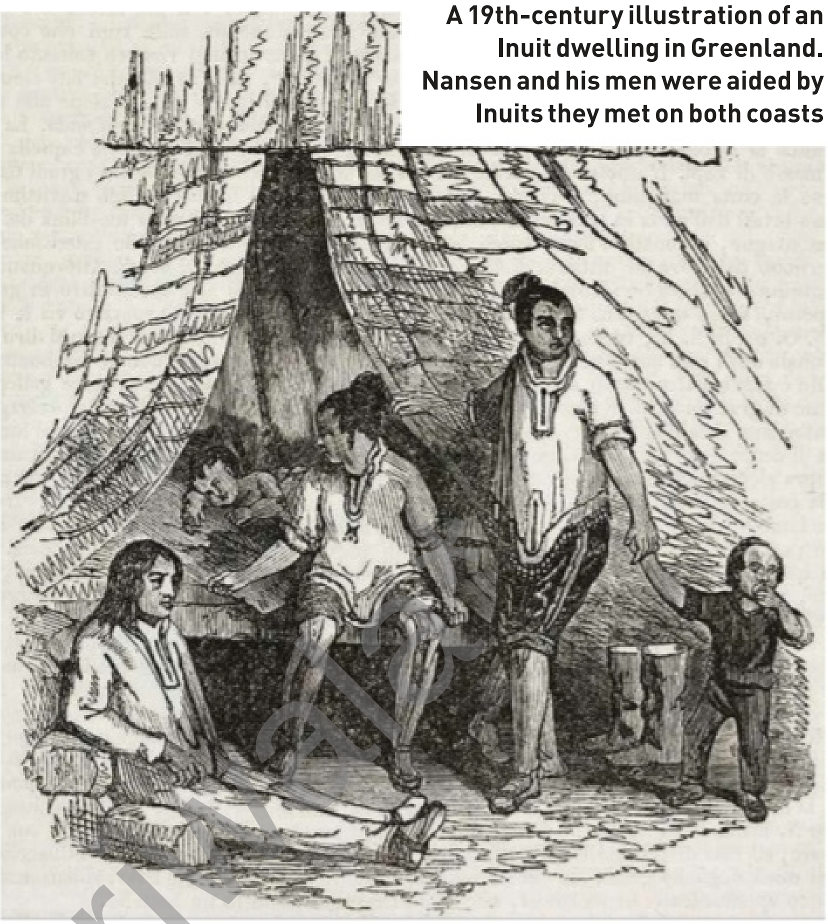


The men in Nansen's party haul sleds, each laden with at least 100kg of equipment and supplies, their shoulders scoured by rope burns. The Norwegian explorer likened the task to hauling dead weight through sand

ALAMY/PUBLIC DOMAIN

→

Icebergs and pack ice were among the obstacles Nansen's expedition faced when rowing to shore before beginning their cross-Greenland trek



A 19th-century illustration of an Inuit dwelling in Greenland. Nansen and his men were aided by Inuits they met on both coasts

Colourful houses line the shore at Nuuk (formerly Godthaab) on Greenland's west coast, where the expedition ended on 3 October 1888, 11 weeks after disembarking from the *Jason*

ALAMY/AWL/BRIDGEMAN

had plummeted lower still that night, perhaps to –45°C, which would have been the lowest ever recorded for that time of year.

At an altitude of around 2,400 metres, the men detected that the ice sheet, which had been level, began to slope slightly downhill: they had passed the midpoint. This allowed them to pick up speed on their skis. Fashioning a sail from tent canvas, on some days they could attach it to their sleds and harness the ice sheet’s downslope winds to make even quicker progress toward the west coast.

On 17 September, two months after disembarking from the *Jason*, the men stopped at 1pm for a quick meal. They were startled to hear birdsong – a snow bunting had alighted nearby. And just two days later, one of the men sighted land through a haze of mist. They could now perceive the western edge of the ice sheet, with a ring of mountains just beyond its terminus, and a network of rivers and bays.

Perilous last leg

Yet though the journey’s end seemed near, the final leg was to prove as difficult as the frozen trek over the centre of the ice. As they pushed toward the edge of the ice, the expedition arrived at another crevasse zone, and the men faced yet more deadly hazards as they attempted to find a safe passage to the shore. At one point, Nansen plunged into a gap and only barely caught himself by instinctively extending his arms. His skis dangled over a seemingly bottomless chasm, and it took every ounce of his strength to pull himself out and crawl to safety.

Progress was slow but eventually, on 24 September, the men crossed the last of the ice fissures, forded a meltwater river and reached a slope descending to a bed of gravel.

Nansen plunged into a crevasse and only barely caught himself by instinct, his skis dangling over a seemingly bottomless chasm

“Like schoolboys released,” Nansen recounted, they “ran wildly about the shore.” The expedition had escaped the ice sheet.

Still, though, they weren’t nearly done. The party was dozens of miles south of Godthaab, separated from the settlement by mountainous terrain and a long, narrow body of water known as Ameralikfjord. While camped in a valley, Otto Sverdrup, a member of Nansen’s team with maritime experience, supervised the building of a small boat from willow branches and canvas. The idea was to use a small craft to reach their final destination.

As the men spent their days working on the project, they enjoyed the warmer weather, hunting hares that they cooked over an open fire. But the warmth of their location quickly proved to be a mixed blessing: armies of black flies descended on the men, swarming over their hands and faces. “They bit us villainously,” Nansen wrote in his journal.

On 29 September, they set out again. Nansen and Sverdrup left for Godthaab, paddling along the fjord in the compact, improvised boat they nicknamed “the tortoise shell”. Their plan was to reach the settlement and send a reconnaissance party back for the other men.

Paddling was tough going, and the two men had to constantly bail out the boat with a soup pot. But four days later, on 3 October, Nansen and Sverdrup landed on a beach at Godthaab. A group of Inuit women came out to welcome them, along with a Danish-speaking official.

“My name is Nansen, and we have just come from the interior,” the expedition’s leader explained.

The local official, Gustav Baumann, had been aware of the expedition. He had also been informed that, unbeknown to the explorer himself, Nansen’s PhD had been awarded in Norway during the crossing of the ice sheet. Baumann startled the young explorer by greeting him with the words: “Allow me to congratulate you on taking your doctor’s degree.”

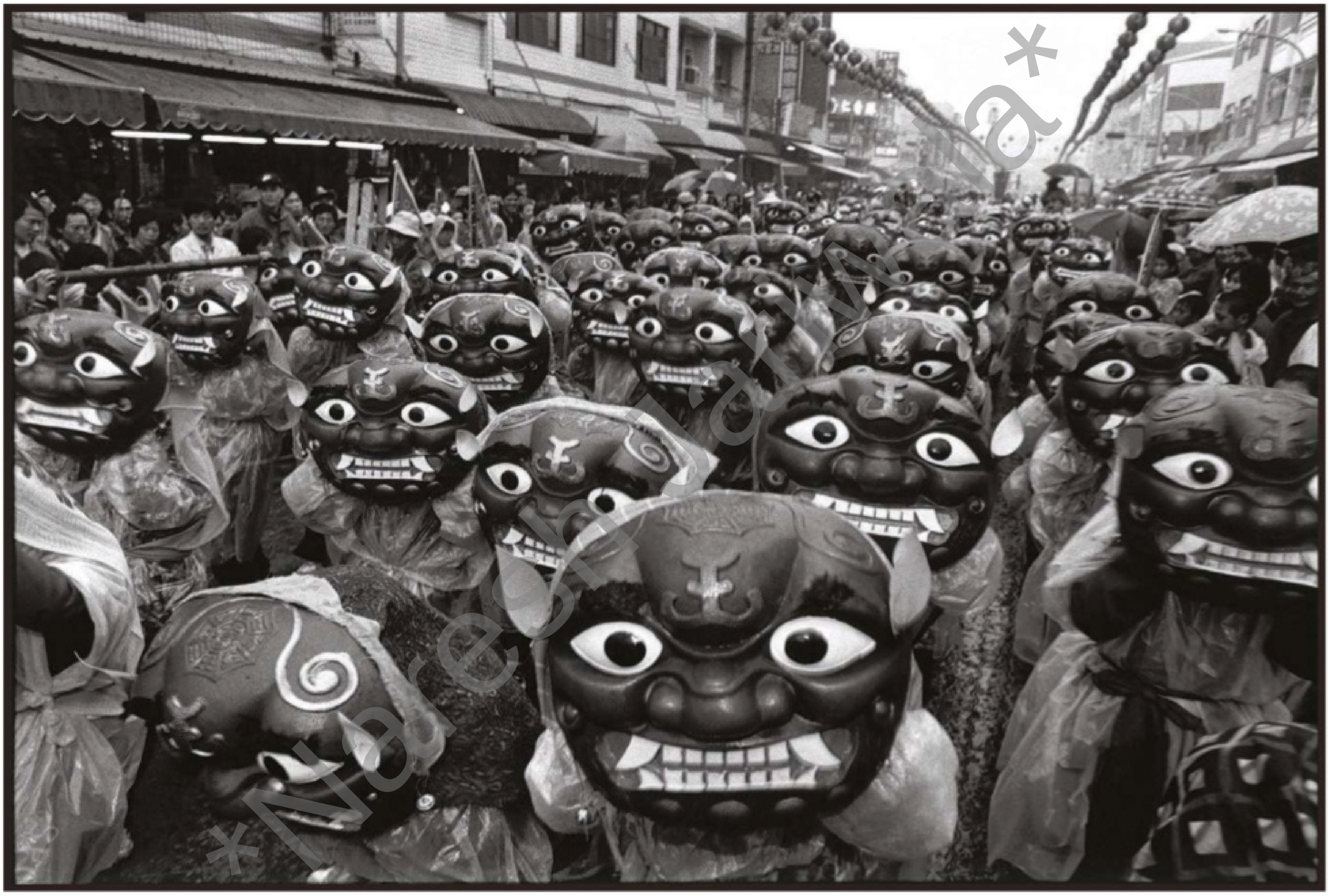
It would take months before Nansen and his crew – the remainder of whom were brought safely to Godthaab from their camp at Ameralikfjord over the next few days – could return to Europe and a triumphant celebration. Nansen discovered that the last ship to depart Godthaab that season had sailed from this harbour two months previously. The only hope of conveying his success to the world before winter was to employ Inuit kayakers, who raced to carry a message to a ship, the *Fox*, which would shortly sail from a mining port 300 miles to the south.

The kayakers paddled furiously – and succeeded. On 9 November 1888, the Danish press published that brief note from Nansen, which was immediately relayed worldwide: “We reached Godthaab on 3 October, and are all in good health.” Fridtjof Nansen had successfully completed his first great polar expedition. 🌐

Jon Gertner is a journalist and historian. His latest book is *The Ice at the End of the World* (Icon, 2019)

Followers of the Chinese Taoist deity Mazu commemorate her birthday

Taiwan | Xingang | 1996



Nareshjammula

CHIEN-CHI CHANG – MAGNUM PHOTOS

Adherents in fearsome masks throng the streets of Xingang, Taiwan, during the annual pilgrimage honouring the sea goddess Mazu. Her birthday is celebrated on the 23rd day of the third month of the Chinese lunar calendar (usually in April) with processions and festivities in various territories. Among the most popular and colourful is the multi-day Dajia Mazu Pilgrimage through central west Taiwan, carrying a sacred statue of the deity to Fengtian Temple in Xingang.

According to legend, Mazu (known in Cantonese as Tin Hau, 'Empress of Heaven') was born Lin Moniang on Meizhou Island in China's Fújiàn province in AD 960. Various myths attribute life-saving miracles to the young girl, who became popular as a protective deity of sailors and fishermen in the centuries after her death.

Migration from Fújiàn to Taiwan was encouraged by Dutch colonial administrators in the 17th century; around 1700, these settlers built Xingang's original Mazu Temple, which became Fengtian. After Japanese occupation of Taiwan in 1895 blocked the 12-yearly pilgrimage to Mazu's shrine on Meizhou, an alternative route through Taiwan was instituted, and from 1987 Fengtian became a key stop. 🌐

Bring your
BACKSTORY TO LIFE™
ancestry

Ancestry helped me discover
my great-grandfather Henry.

In 1904, Henry was a paperboy.
Ten years later, he went to war
and was featured in the paper
himself, commended for bravery.

I didn't know my great-grandad
Henry... But now I do.

**Bring your backstory to life
with a 14-day free trial.***

One free trial per person. Must register with credit or debit card. Unless you cancel before end of free trial you will be charged for your selected membership. Membership auto renews at the end of each membership period, unless notified otherwise. If you do not wish to renew cancel at least 2 days before renewal by visiting My Account or calling 0800 404 9723.

Naresh Janwala